



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 87.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S TENDERFOOT PARDS

OR
THE BOYS IN BLACK



AGAIN HIS RIFLE WENT TO HIS SHOULDER, ONCE MORE THERE WAS A QUICK AIM. AND THE REPORT FOLLOWED. "I HOPE I GOT THE LEADER, FOR HE IS THE ONE I WANT," SAID BUFFALO BILL.



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BUFFALO BILL'S TENDERFOOT PARDS;

OR.

The Boys in Black.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

ON A SECRET MISSION.

"This is terrible! It is appalling, and the red deed calls to Heaven for vengeance!"

The one who uttered these startling words was a man of world-wide fame—no less a personage than Buffalo Bill—among men the born hero of the plains.

It was in the gray dusk of morning, and the scene was upon the limitless plains of the far frontier.

Two companions accompanied Buffalo Bill on that morning. He was acting as guide for them to a settlement whither he was going on an important mission.

The two were young men fresh from the civilization of the East—one a recent graduate of Yale, going to teach school in the border settlement, and by name Allan Tremain; the other, Dallas Donohue, a young physician, who accompanied his friend to begin the practice of medicine there in the new country among the farmer settlers, the miners and cattlemen.

They had left the stage on the Overland Trail, and were told that they must await some parties going through, as the trails were beset with dangers—Indians

and road agents being the ones to fear, not to speak of the fear of being lost in that then unbounded wilderness.

But just then a stranger had ridden into the little stage station, alone and on his way to the settlement which the young men sought.

He was at tall, splendidly formed man, dressed in velvet coat, black trousers, slouch hat, but showing no weapons about his person.

He looked like a border sport, and his dark, strikingly handsome face was lighted up with most expressive eyes, while a mustache with curling ends but half concealed his determined, resolute mouth.

The keeper of the tavern had appeared to recognize him, but ere the host could speak his name, he received a warning sign and heard the words:

"Landlord, I am going to the Silver Thread Settlement, and would like you to take care of me to-night and put me on the right trail to-morrow."

The young men heard the name of the settlement they wished to find and listened attentively, their gaze riveted by the appearance of the striking stranger.

"You kin git lodgin's fer man and horse, pard, at my

lay-out; but whar is ther rest of yer outfit?" asked the landlord.

"I am alone, pard."

"And goin' to ther Silver Thread Settlement?"

"That is my intention."

"I guess you be a stranger in these parts."

"Well, you might call me so."

"Yer don't look like a durned fool."

"I am not generally picked up as one."

"Waal, maybe yer hain't; but fer yer ter strike trail alone to Silver Thread, yer would be set down as a tenderfoot hopin' ter git some one ter kill him."

"Is it so bad as that?"

"And wuss."

"I was told I could not reach this station, that redskins and road agents were on the trail; but here I am, safe and hungry," said the stranger, smiling.

"What trail did you come?"

"Down the Dead River Valley."

"Whew! You war playin' in great luck, for the whole country is as full o' Injuns an' outlaws as a Bullfoundland pup is of fleas."

"Well, I simply passed, as we say in the game of poker, and here I am."

"Luck can't stick to one man clean through a trail, and says I to you, jist wait until a wagon train, or soldiers goes through, or you'll tarn up yer toes."

"Why, here is two gents, tenderfoots from ther Land o' ther Risin' Sun, and greener than grass in May, awaitin' ter shove through to Silver Thread; but they has horse sense enough ter wait here and find company."

"All right; I'm company; so if they wish to go through with me, let them say the word, for I shall start at day-break."

"Now, let me remind you, Pard Landlord, that I am hungry."

"Follow my trail, pard," and, once out of the saloon, the landlord turned and grasped the hand of the stranger guest, and cried:

"But I is glad to see you, and I'd like to give away who you was, though you hain't togged up as usual, and you has been scalpin' yer chin, I sees, and choppin' off yer long hair."

"I cut my imperial off, Pard Sankey, but my long hair is done up under my hat, for I'm on a secret trail and do not care to be known."

"But who are the two going through to Silver Thread?"

"Gents, both of 'em, if they do be tenderfeet—true gents; one a son o' Settler Tremain, the big man o' the settlement; and t'other a young medicine man going to practice there."

"Very well; let them go through with me, for there will doubtless be use for a medicine man there before long."

The landlord soon returned to the saloon, and, going over to the table where the two young men sat, playing an innocent game of cards, said:

"Young fellers, you kin pack yer grips ter go through to-morrow at daylight, and I'll have horses ready for yer."

"Is there a train going?"

"No, only one man."

"That splendid-looking fellow you were talking to?"

"Yes, ther same."

"But that will only make three of us!"

"Don't you fool yerself, young feller! It makes a dozen, for I'll tell yer a secret—that man be Buffalo Bill!"

CHAPTER II.

THE GIANT SPORT.

Upon the old idea, "when in Rome do as the Romans do," Allan Tremain was inveigled into a game of cards that night in the combined hotel, saloon and gambling den of Landlord Sankey, and which was known as the "Last Chance Lay-out," it being the end of that branch of the Overland stage line.

To his credit be it said, Allan Tremain did not wish to play, but he also did not wish to anger the rough element about him, and so he and Dr. Donohue had entered into a little game with several miners and had won, they both being exceedingly fortunate.

The sums won were not large, and, chiming in with their surroundings, both had "stood treat," and were about to leave the saloon and retire early, preparatory to taking a daybreak start for Silver Thread Settlement the next morning with Buffalo Bill as their guide and comrade.

They had heard and read much of the famous scout, and when the landlord had imparted to them the secret of who he was, they had been most anxious to go with him on the trail which they had been told before would not be safe to travel with less than a score of men at least.

"I say, tenderfoot pards, you may be squar', and yer may not, but when strangers wins straight games in this part o' ther country, we honest men suspects 'em of bein' card sharps, and you two galoots hain't lost a single game, and treatin' don't squar' yer in this crowd, as yer doubtless pays for the drinks with counterfeit money while yer is too toney ter drink yerselves, but takes a segar."

This long and insulting speech was delivered by a man who suddenly stepped directly before the two friends as they were about to leave the saloon.

The man was half a dozen inches over six feet, broad-shouldered, quick of action, and was known as the "Giant Sport," also as "Circus Sam, the Iron Man," he having once been the strong man of a circus, but openly confessed that he had killed two men and had been forced to fly for his life; hence had sought the congenial atmosphere of the Far West.

If there had been any doubt about his having been slayer of men in the East, there certainly was not since he had come to the border, for he made it his boast that he had "his own private burying-ground, where he planted all those he killed, at his own expense."

As a gambler he had wonderful luck, and playing cards and fighting was about all that he did until he was a greatly feared in one way as in the other.

When, therefore, the Giant Sport stepped up before the two young men from the East, and said what he did there was a general hush in the large saloon, for those there knew that Circus Sam intended to treat the "tenderfeet" to a scene, nothing of a very startling nature having occurred in Trail End since their arrival some days before.

All eyes were upon the two strangers, both of whom

were finely built, athletic young fellows, with the look of men who were not cowards, though unused to the ways of the wild West.

They were not attired in the frontier fashion, either, but wore traveling suits and derby hats, which, in the eyes of Circus Sam, was a crime that should be atoned for, he being dressed in gray woolen shirt, buckskin leggings stuck in top-boots, wearing a broad sombrero and carrying a belt with a bowie-knife and three revolvers, while about his neck was swung a massive gold chain, and a diamond stud glittered in the black scarf knotted on his shirt front.

"You speak such a jargon of slang and dialect that I do not know that I exactly catch your meaning, but it seems as though you accuse us of cheating at cards," said Allan Tremain, quietly, and the crowd awaited with bated breath, for they felt that he did not know just who Circus Sam was.

"Waal, yer is right; I does say yer is card sharps, ter win straight games as—"

He did not finish the sentence, for the right hand of Allan Tremain shot out with the force and quickness of a mule's hind leg, and the fist catching the bravo directly under the ear, sent him backward and downward in a heap.

"Good, Allan! You never gave a better blow when you were the champion heavyweight at college," cried Dallas Donohue, delighted at the knock-down blow of his friend.

But the end was not yet, for it was no college affair the two young men had to face, but a frontier game of life and death, as the bully arose with a yell of rage, with a revolver already in his hand, while he roared out the words:

"I'll have the lives of both of yer, fer Circus Sam never takes a blow, and lets the man live that gives it!"

"You are mistaken, pard!" cried a ringing voice, and the tall form of Buffalo Bill glided into the room.

Seizing the arm of Circus Sam and wrenching the revolver from his grasp, he hurled him to the floor, where, putting his foot upon his neck, Buffalo Bill said, sternly:

"Now ask that stranger's pardon for the insult you gave him, or I will pin you to the floor with my bowie-knife!"

CHAPTER III.

THE BRINK OF DEATH.

Buffalo Bill had appeared to be unarmed, and with his long hair hidden under his slouch hat, and dressed in a hunting suit more appropriate to the East than the West, he might also have been mistaken for a tenderfoot.

But the bowie with which he had threatened to pin the Giant Sport to the floor had suddenly appeared in his hand, his foot was hard across the throat of the prostrate man, and there was a dangerous light in his eyes as he made the threat, and Circus Sam saw it.

The Hercules Sport did not know who his antagonist was who had so quickly championed the cause of the two tenderfeet. This champion was not his height by some inches, nor his weight by fifty pounds; but Sam, as did all the others, marveled at his wondrous quickness and physical strength, displayed in snatching the pistol from

the Giant Sport's iron hand, then hurling him to the floor as though he had been any ordinary man.

The display of strength and cleverness had also caused the two young men to gaze with admiration at the scout, while, plucky and able to look after themselves, they pressed to the aid of their defender.

"If you move a finger to draw a weapon or attempt to rise, you'll sign your death-warrant, and I tell you now I'll stand no nonsense, so ask the pardon of these gentlemen for insulting them."

"Does yer call them gents?" hoarsely growled the bravo.

"Judged by your standard, they are not; but did you hear me?"

"What has you ter do with it?"

"I am a Western man, and they are strangers here, so shall not be insulted by such as you.

"Come, no delay, but ask their pardon as I tell you."

"Who is you?"

"Your friends will read the name of the man who killed you on your tombstone," was the alarmingly significant reply.

"Yas, and I has friends who will avenge me."

"It will be cheaper for you to apologize than to have your friends avenge you."

"S'pose I say I won't."

"Come! no nonsense! Ask their pardon or take the consequences!"

The foot of the scout bore more heavily upon the man's neck, while, suddenly dropping upon one knee, Buffalo Bill placed the point of his bowie-knife over the heart of the Giant Sport and said, sternly:

"Obey me!"

There was a deep hush upon the crowd, and Allan Tremain and Dr. Donohue, who had been anxious to take the quarrel off the scout's hands, not realizing their danger, had been checked by Landlord Sankey, who said in a whisper:

"Don't chip in, young fellers, for ye'll be shot full o' holes, and he'll run ther game, for I told yer who he is."

In the hush that followed the scout's last command and act the big bravo saw that he must for once back down, and fully realized his danger.

"You hear, pard, so talk quick," and the sharp point of Buffalo Bill's knife just pricked the skin over the bully's heart.

But it was hint enough, as he cried out:

"Then I asks yer pardon, gents, and, as I was downed, I says, step up all and take a drink, fer it's my treat.

"I means you, too, pard, for you is ther first man who ever downed Circus Sam."

And he turned to Buffalo Bill, who remarked:

"You forget the knock-down blow that gentleman gave you, and for which you, like a coward, intended to kill him and his companion. I drink with no such a bully as you are; and, though I do not wish to influence others, I would yet urge those two young gentlemen to refuse also, as you are only playing a game to win in the end."

"We will take your advice and refuse, sir," Tremain said, while, now on his feet once more, and with his weapons ready to grasp, Circus Sam said, savagely:

"Now, the man that refuses to drink with me, insults me and has to fight."

"What do you say, pards? For there is three agin' me, as ye sees."

And the ruffian turned to the crowd, who had ranged in line for a drink at his expense, while his eyes fell upon those whom he could rely upon to back him up in a difficulty.

Buffalo Bill now knew that the bravo intended to force a fight that he might kill the two young men and himself, and a glance over the crowd showed that there was a dangerous element there who would be the backers of the Giant Sport.

What had to be done must be done quickly, and with nerve, so he seized upon the words of the bravo that there were three against him, and said:

"No; I alone am against you, and as you seem crying for a fight, fire away!"

The scout had drawn a weapon in a second of time, and the bravo was covered before his hand could grasp his own revolver.

But there were others, his minions, who were now ready to support the Giant Sport, and one of them shouted:

"Draw, Sam, for I has him covered!"

"And I have you covered!"

"Up with you hands, quick, or I pull the trigger!"

And another person appeared upon the scene, a revolver in each hand, as he suddenly sprung between Buffalo Bill and his foes.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERIOUS MAN IN BLUE.

The newcomer upon the scene, and at the moment when a scene of death would soon have been ushered in, riveted every eye upon him, save that of Buffalo Bill, who never took his gaze off the Giant Sport.

Had he done so, the lightning-like quickness with which Circus Sam could draw a weapon might have cost him his life.

The Giant Sport knew the voice of the newcomer upon the scene, and was ready for Buffalo Bill to turn his head to see who he was, as he spoke as he entered the room.

But the scout was caught in no such fatal error, and yet he saw, without appearing to do so, an elegant form, slightly built, yet with the physique of an athlete, suddenly appear between him and the Giant Sport.

Nor was this all that the scout saw, for his attire was strikingly picturesque, being a dark blue velvet jacket trimmed with silver lace and buttons, broadcloth pants of the same hue, and with a silver cord down the outer seam, and with top-boots of military pattern, the heels of which were armed with spurs.

A white silk *négligé* shirt with wide collar, a black scarf with a ruby in it, the match to which was upon the little finger of his left hand, a blue sombrero embroidered with silver, and a sash about his slender waist half concealing his belt of arms, made up his striking appearance.

His face was beardless, youthful, for he seemed scarcely over twenty, and his features were refined and expressive, yet with a look upon them as though his life had been shadowed by some sorrow or crime.

Masses of waving hair fell below his shoulders, adding to his look an almost womanly appearance, and about him as he entered the saloon there was a look of recklessness

as though he defied danger and gloried in risking his life in a good cause.

That he was known to those present was shown by a chorus of voices crying out as he entered:

"The Man in Blue!"

"Now, pards, looks out for deadly music!"

The situation was dramatic and thrilling. For a moment it seemed as though it would end in the cracking of a dozen revolvers, for the Giant Sport's friends had rallied when they saw him again under the shadow of death from the stranger whom no one there, save the landlord, seemed to know as Buffalo Bill.

"I said hands up! Did you hear?" and the Man in Blue broke the hush upon all by his clear, resonant voice.

As though his power was known and felt, the weapons that covered Buffalo Bill were lowered instantly, and as his eyes ran over the crowd the men belonging to the Giant Sport's clique raised their hands.

"Did you hear, sir?"

"With a quick step forward, the Man in Blue faced the Giant Sport and drove the muzzle of his revolver hard into his face.

Instantly the arms went up with a swing, and then the Man in Blue spoke, turning toward Buffalo Bill as though defying those his presence had subdued to fire upon him:

"You and your friends are strangers here, I see, sir, and it never fails that there are cowards in Trail End City to force them into deadly feuds.

"I have interests here, and am captain of the Vigilantes, so you need have no fear of further trouble, for my word goes.

"Will you all join me in a drink, gentlemen, and that means you, Circus Sam, and your pards?"

A wild cheer greeted the words of the Man in Blue, and, turning to the bar, he ordered drinks and cigars set up for the crowd, who quickly gathered around to take advantage of a treat.

Buffalo Bill saw him replace his revolvers, and noted that, as he said, the trouble was over, at least for that time, for he was well aware that he had made Circus Sam and his followers his enemies for life.

But he replaced his revolver and gazed with deep interest upon the strange man who had come to his aid.

He had often heard of the "Mysterious Man in Blue," as he was called, for other than that he was a prospector, or gold-hunter, roaming at will through the frontier, no one knew aught of him, it seemed.

It was said that he was the deadliest of shots, and had a record of having killed a number of men, forcing those who sought a quarrel with him, or with whom he had trouble, to meet him in a duel, thus giving them equal chances.

Rumor had it that he had found gold enough to make him a millionaire, but of that no one knew, for he still roamed the plains and mountains in quest of more, and was content to live a wild, dangerous existence to going where his riches would bring him every luxury.

"I have heard of you often, sir, and now am under a deep debt of gratitude to you, for in aiding these two gentlemen I woke up a hornets' nest," remarked Buffalo Bill.

"I have seen you before, sir, but, as you seem to be unknown here I will not speak your name—mine is Ford

Belfont, and if you happen near where I have a camp at any time I will be glad to have you as my guest, you and your friends. Good-night," and tossing several bills on the bar, the Mysterious Man in Blue raised his sombrero and left the saloon, the landlord leading Buffalo Bill and the two young men out quickly after him as though dreading further trouble.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN FOR THE WORK.

"Cody, I sent for you to put your life in danger, for your valuable services are needed."

So spoke Colonel Royall, commandant of Fort Defiance, at which dangerous military post in the wildest of the Indian country, Buffalo Bill was chief of scouts at this time, having been recently transferred there from Fort Faraway, where he had finished up a great fight against the outlaws in that vicinity.

"I am ready, colonel, for any service I can render the army, sir," was the prompt response of William Cody in answer to the words of the commandant.

"But let me tell you now, Cody, that this is not a military service you are going upon, for I am glad you so promptly accepted the mission I desire you to undertake."

"Whatever the duty, sir, I am under your orders, and will be glad to do all I can."

"I feel, I know that, and for just that reason I need you, as you are the man for the work, the man above all others who can do it successfully, though the risk you will run will be terrible."

"My life belongs to my country, sir."

"Well said, Cody, especially when I know that day and night you risk it in the performance of your arduous duties as chief of scouts at this post."

"But now to the work in hand."

"Yes, sir."

"I received some time ago an urgent letter from an old friend of mine, a boyhood friend, Judge Oswald Tremain, whose goodness of heart in indorsing for others ruined him financially and caused him to try and rebuild his fortunes."

"Accompanied by his wife and daughter, and leaving his son to graduate at Yale, and then follow him, the judge joined a large party of emigrants and settled in Silver Thread Valley, of which I believe you know something?"

"I have scouted and hunted through there, sir, when there was not a cabin or a fort within a hundred miles of the valley."

"So I was assured, and you are, therefore, better fitted for the work in hand, as you know the country."

"I know every foot of it, sir," I may say."

"Well, in spite of the strength of the settlement, the Indians cause a great deal of trouble at times, but even worse than they are the bands of outlaws, the road agents, who rob the messengers, the Pony Riders bearing the mails, all wagon trains and persons going to and fro."

"A weekly coach is now to be established to Silver Thread from Trail End City, and as the mines in the mountains are beginning to pay well, the outlaws will be more desperate in their efforts at robbery, and they

are organized into a secret band that no one knows the retreat of, while, Judge Tremain writes me, there is reason to believe that some of the settlers are secretly outlaws."

A Vigilante company was formed to hunt them down, and at once the outlaws began to hunt the Vigilantes, showing them no mercy, and marking each member for death, until in terror the band broke up to save their lives.

"Herds of cattle have been run off, horses stolen, houses raided, and the miners have been robbed in their camp and on the trail, until a perfect reign of terror and death exists there, for even young girls have been kidnapped and held for ransom."

"Such is the situation, and Judge Tremain implores me to send a company of cavalry to the valley to put down the outlaws."

"This, however, I cannot do, as my powers are limited; but, desirous of helping him and the people, I thought the matter over, and suddenly it dawned upon me that you were the man for the work, and so I sent for you."

"I am ready to go, sir, and take as many men as you deem necessary, sir."

"That is just it, for I cannot spare a company, nor any of your scouts. In fact, I do not see how we will get along without you, but we must."

"Then I am to go alone, sir?"

"Alone, yes, Cody; but you are a host in yourself, and, as I said before, the very man for the desperate work to be done."

"How shall I go about it, sir?"

"That you must decide. I will give you the authority of a United States marshal, which I can do, and place no limit upon you as to time, so go about the matter in your own clever way."

"I'll give you a letter to Judge Tremain, but to all others you had better remain unknown until you deem it best to take off your mask, so to speak."

"When do you think you can start, sir?"

"Within the hour, sir."

"Take longer time, if you wish, and yet delays are dangerous, you know."

"I will go at once and get ready, sir."

"It is a long trail, and I will carry a pack horse with me, for I suppose the duty will detain me perhaps for several months."

"All of that, and for all expenses needed the paymaster will fit you out."

Thus it was that Buffalo Bill started upon his secret mission, his trail leading him through Trail End City, where he so strangely and opportunely arrived in time to go to the rescue of Allan Tremain and Dr. Donohue, whom the Giant Sport had singled out for victims.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEADLY WARNING.

When the day dawned upon Trail End City, Buffalo Bill and his two "tenderfoot parads," as he called them, were a mile on their trail to Silver Thread Settlement.

The scout found them pleasant companions, intelligent, cheery fellows, ready for any hardship, and he had seen their courage put very severely to the test the night before, and knew that he could trust them in a close place.

He had suggested their buckling on a belt of arms each,

and securing rifles, and these weapons Landlord Sankey had for sale, as he had a supply on hand left by his guests who had been killed soon after arriving in Trail End City.

They were both well mounted, too, and, being fine riders and fair shots, the scout told them it would not take long to take the tenderfoot out of them.

The trail was a long one, in places dangerous from meeting bands of roving redskins, and almost anywhere along it there was a possibility of meeting road agents, if half the tales were true that were told of the outlaws' doings in the valley and on the trails leading to it.

"We will camp early, to-night, pards, as we can make the valley in good time to-morrow night," said Bill, and he was looking about for a good camping-place, where wood, water and grass could be found, when he suddenly drew rein, for there was heard the clatter of hoofs ahead on the trail, and the next moment a horse dashed into view.

But the horse held a rider all saw at a glance, and a thrill of horror shot through them as they beheld him.

It was a man, and he was stretched out on the back of the horse to which he was securely bound.

As the horse was dashing on at full speed, the form bound to his back, he neighed wildly at the sight of the horsemen, yet did not check his mad career.

Buffalo Bill, now on the alert, gathered his lasso, ready to act in the startling emergency.

Nearer came the frightened steed, with its frightful burden, and then the scout sent his lasso flying through the air, and the frightened horse and his rider were brought to a sudden halt.

"My God! the man is dead!" cried Dr. Donohue, as he sprang to the side of the horse and felt the pulse of the man in irons, while Buffalo Bill cut the thong loose and then, pointing to a wound in his side, said:

"With that knife thrust in his heart, yes."

"I did not see that wound. It means red work has been done."

"Yes, doctor; but, see! here in this hand!"

One of the hands, the right, was tightly clasped, and bound thus with buckskin thongs, but in it was clasped a piece of paper which Buffalo Bill drew out and read aloud.

It was as follows:

"WARNING!"

"By this, the last one of the members of the Silver Thread Valley Vigilantes, we send this warning that should another band be raised to put us down, taking from us our right of outlawry, we will again put to death each and every one of them.

"The last band of Vigilantes numbered twenty-one, and the last, their captain, bears this warning to you, settlers of Silver Thread Valley, for his four comrades lie dead and manacled, awaiting burial, on the summit of Lookout Mound.

"Go there and you will find them, and heed not this warning if you dare.

"THE BOYS IN BLACK."

Buffalo Bill's fine face paled as he read this, and then he said:

"We will go on and see if they have done as they said,

for Lookout Mound is about ten miles from here, and there is a good camp near it.

"We will carry this poor fellow along and bury him with the rest, for though the night will be cloudy and black, I have a dark lantern by which I can follow the trail."

"They evidently expected the poor horse to go to the settlement, but in his fright and suffering he got off the trail."

With this the horse was taken in lead and the party moved on, Buffalo Bill leading, and not a word being spoken, for the tragedy they had come upon so suddenly had impressed them all deeply.

Night soon fell, but the scout led on unerringly, though the darkness at times was intense, and the two young men wondered how he could find his way in the midnight gloom.

But at last Buffalo Bill said:

"There looms up Lookout Mound before us, and I have heard that it has been the scene of many a tragedy—I know of one that happened here in which I was an actor.

"I will light my lantern, for the trail up to the summit is a rough and dangerous one."

The scout dismounted, lighted his lantern, and as he moved on up the trail Tremain and Donohue followed him, leading their horses.

At last the summit was reached, and, bending forward, Buffalo Bill flashed his lantern upon four dark forms that lay still and cold in death at his feet.

As he did so out of the darkness behind him came a burst of wild, demoniacal laughter.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SCOUT'S VOW.

The laugh which was heard by Buffalo Bill and his two companions, coming as it did out of the darkness, caused the scout at once to close the lantern slide he held in his hand, and leave all gloom about them, while he said quickly in a low whisper:

"Come this way to shelter, as we may get a shot."

The two young men hastily obeyed, and all three led their horses over to the other side of the mound and there remained silent and watchful.

"What a wild laugh?" whispered Allan Tremain.

"Yes, it was the laughter of a madman," returned Dr. Donohue, in the same low tone, while Buffalo Bill remarked:

"I believe you have struck it, doctor; it did sound like the laugh of a madman, and its not being repeated leads me to believe that some poor unfortunate fellow is near us."

Hardly had the scout spoken when once again was heard the burst of wild laughter. It came from out of the gloom several hundred feet away and at the base of the large mound, and as its echoes ceased, a voice cried in deep tones:

"He laughs best that laughs last. Now is my time for joy, for Buffalo Bill is on the trail!"

"Now is my time to be avenged—ha! ha! ha!"

"There will be red work now in Silver Thread Valley—ha! ha! ha!"

The voice died away in the distance; the clatter of

hoofs that followed grew fainter until, at last, it died down hearing in the distance.

"Well, pards, what do you think of the Wild West as far as you have got?" queried Buffalo Bill, dryly, when the sound of hoofs no longer came to their ears.

"A remarkable country, indeed, scout—full of surprises that are startling," answered Allan Tremain.

"Yes, and with people as startling as their surprises," added the young doctor.

"We are tenderfeet and cannot deny it, but we are beginning to catch on fast. I do not wonder that this country produces wonderful men.

"We thought we knew it all, but we are as innocent as babes out here, and if you were not with us we would be as helpless."

"Well, doctor, you will soon learn, and you will make good plainsmen with the nerve you have, for it requires nerve as the first of all acquisitions to live out here.

"But now to our wild man."

"Yes, he called your name."

"That is what surprised me."

"And did he mean that he would avenge himself upon you, or that you would avenge him now that you were here?"

"That was not exactly clear to me, Mr. Tremain; but let it be one way or the other I do not care, for all goes. I am here for a purpose, and that purpose will be accomplished if I live.

"Now let us seek a camp. There is a good one not far away, but we must pack those bodies with us, or the coyotes would soon be after them."

"The dead men will outnumber the living in our camp," observed young Tremain, but he willingly assisted in placing the bodies upon the horses.

This done, the two friends followed the lead of the scout down the rugged trail to a place where there was an excellent camp.

"There have been campers recently here—the Boys in Black, as they signed themselves. It was they who murdered these poor fellows," and Buffalo Bill pointed to the smoldering remains of a camp-fire.

A fire was soon started and the horses staked out, after which the four bodies found at the mound, and the one brought along, which, Mazeppa like, had been found, bound to his horse, were placed side by side in the shadow of some *pinon* trees nearby.

Supper was cooked and disposed of, after which the two young men were glad to seek their blankets, their first outdoor camp upon the far frontier.

The scout said that he would keep watch, and when he had scouted about the camp and found all quiet, and the horses feeding, as though no danger was near, he halted by the bodies of the five dead, manacled forms.

Standing there with uncovered head, as the firelight fell upon the dead, Buffalo Bill said, in a low, stern voice:

"I came here to do my duty, and I now make a solemn vow to avenge these murdered men."

CHAPTER VIII.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

"Ah! this looks suspicious."

Buffalo Bill drew rein as he spoke and gazed fixedly down at the ground.

What he saw that "looked suspicious," Allan Tremain and Dr. Donohue could not discover, but they watched him closely.

They had passed the night in their first camp in undisturbed rest, and, in the morning, had buried the five dead men, the scout removing the irons by unlocking them with keys from a bunch he carried, and remarking as he did so, in his quiet way:

"These are consecrated to revenge, and will be useful some day."

The young men had watched him place heavy logs over the large grave, to keep the coyotes away, and Tremain said in a low tone:

"We are learning, Doc."

"How can we help doing so with a teacher who knows more about the frontier game than our great football coach at Yale does of the game of football."

After a couple of hours' ride on the trail, they saw the scout halt at something suspicious he had discovered. They watched him attentively and curiously.

At last Buffalo Bill said:

"We'll follow this trail, pards."

"What trail?"

"This one that crosses ours."

"I don't see any, but I suppose it is there," young Tremain remarked.

"Oh, yes, it is there, though faint, I admit.

"Now, this trail, you see, comes from over yonder on that range, and it crosses ours and branches off to the left, which indicates to me that, whoever left the trail, saw us coming from yonder spur; and so, knowing that we were following the direct track to Silver Thread Valley, crossed here to get on ahead to the range, twenty miles away yonder, and there ambush us.

"Now, if we follow their trail, we will surprise them, you understand, not they us, so we will just branch off and see what it will turn out. We will not be taken very far off our trail to the valley.

"Then, too, we could have come by a shorter trail from Trail End City, and which would have brought us by yonder spur, as this one leads, so that some one from the camps may have decided to head us off here and get even for the little powwow of night before last.

"I came this trail as it is the safest one, though longer; and it is well we did, having made the discovery on it of the five murdered Vigilantes."

"You read signs as though you were reading an open book before you, Mr. Cody," said Allan Tremain.

"It is wonderful," the doctor coincided, and added:

"We are in your hands, so command and we obey; but first show me what you call a fresh trail crossing the one we are traveling?"

"See here; though the ground is hard, you can see faint traces on it which are made by ironshod horses. I can trace it back yonder, and on ahead for quite a distance."

"Yes; now that you speak of it, we can see it, but never would have noticed it otherwise."

"You will soon learn to take note of every sign out here, doctor, for therein is the virtue of being a good plainsman.

"Now we will go on."

And the scout led the way once more, the others fol-

lowing, leading the pack horse and the animal that had been found with the man tied upon his back.

A tract of low, wooded country was soon after passed through, and then came the foothills of the range towering ahead, and beyond which lay the Silver Thread Valley.

Unerringly the scout followed the trail, remarking, after several miles had been gone over and having come to spots where the tracks were plainly visible:

"There were five horses."

"That means as many men?"

"Not necessarily, Mr. Tremain, as they may have had a led horse along."

"True."

"But my idea is, from watching the tracks, that there are three men, as two of the trails swerve as though the horses were led."

"Then if you expect trouble with them, there is one each."

"Yes, doctor, unless we are caught in an ambush, and then one man in cover is worth half a dozen riding upon him."

"True."

"But if they intend to ambush us, it will be on the trail we were following, and, by striking them in the rear, we will have the advantage."

"When we reach further in the foothills, I will go ahead on foot all of an eighth of a mile, leaving you to follow."

At a point further on, Buffalo Bill dismounted and went on ahead, the two young men slowly following with his horse and the led animals, and watching the trail closely so as not to go astray.

They had gone about a mile, when they found the scout waiting for them.

"There they are, half a mile away, lying in wait on the trail we would have taken."

"There are five horses, but I cannot see all the men, and they are protected well where they are from any one approaching on the other trail, but you see we have flanked them."

"We can only ride on our way from here, and when they see us, if they wish to attack us let them do so."

And Buffalo Bill mounted and rode slowly out of the shelter of the hills on toward the high range some miles ahead of them.

They had gone but a short distance when the men in ambush discovered them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE UNTOLD SECRET.

When those they were lying in wait to catch were suddenly discovered in the rear, having flanked them, there was great excitement.

Their horses were staked out a couple of hundred yards from where they were in ambush among some rocks overgrown with scrub pines.

To their horses they ran with full speed, carrying their rifles in their hands, and as they broke cover Buffalo Bill said, quietly:

"There are three of them."

"Now you will have a chance for a border fight."

"Then you will attack them?"

"No, doctor, they have been caught in the act, and so will attack us."

"Then it will be three to three, so tell us what to do."

"Let them first show their hands," said Buffalo Bill, and he rode quietly on toward the range.

The three men had reached their horses meanwhile, hastily bridled them, and, leaving two still staked out, came riding rapidly toward Buffalo Bill and his companions, one of them waving his hat and shouting as he did so.

"They wish us to halt, so their intentions cannot be hostile after all," said Allan Tremain.

Buffalo Bill smiled, and said:

"It is a trick, for they have been caught in an ugly business, and they wish to try and make us believe our own eyes deceived us."

"Then you will not accept their friendly offers?"

"Did we do so, our toes would be turned up within five minutes."

"That is their game, to pretend friendship, catch us off our guard, and then suddenly open fire upon us."

"Hark!"

As the scout spoke one of the men hailed and called out:

"Ho, pards come here, for we were watching redskins, and there are more than we can handle."

"Come on and join us in standing them off."

"Why, they are all right," said Dr. Donohue.

"Yes, friendly enough," added Allan Tremain.

But Buffalo Bill's answer to the words of the man, as he and his two comrades had now halted within a couple of hundred yards, was to suddenly throw his rifle to his shoulder and call out:

"Hands up, all of you! You are all the Indians we have to fear!"

"Give it to them, pards, for they are onto us! We has got to fight," came in the voice of the one who had before spoken, and instantly they dropped from their saddles down on the off-side of their horses, and their rifles were fired almost together.

But Buffalo Bill had pulled trigger, too, and though he had only a man's head to aim at, his bullet sped true and one of the trio went down, while the fire of the other two killed the scout's pack horse and slightly wounded Allan Tremain in the arm.

Buffalo Bill's two companions had not been slow in realizing that he was right, that the three men were treacherous and foes to the bitter end.

Before the scout could tell them to take their horses as a shelter, they had slipped from their saddles, had their rifles leveled and pulled trigger.

"Bravo! you got one man and a horse!" cried Buffalo Bill as he saw one of the two men drop and the horse of the other also go down, his rider throwing himself quickly behind him.

"Now, hands up, or take the home trail!" shouted Buffalo Bill, willing to be merciful.

But the man fired, and the shot dropped the doctor's horse, while, leaping to his feet, he sprang into the saddle of one of his comrade's horses and darted away, firing as he rode.

But he had not made half a dozen rods before the rifle of Buffalo Bill again cracked, and he fell heavily to the ground.

"Wiped out," coolly said Buffalo Bill, and, turning to Allan Tremain, he continued:

"Now, pard, you were hit, I believe?"

"Slightly, in the arm, but as it gives Donohue his first case, I should not, as his friend, complain," was the plucky response of Allan Tremain.

"Well, I'll leave you in the doctor's hands while I look after those two loose horses," said Buffalo Bill, seeing that Tremain's wound was not serious, rode off at a gallop to where the three men had fallen, and two of their horses were feeding near.

"Ho, doctor, here is another case for you," cried the scout, as he found that one of the men was still alive.

As the wound had been quickly bandaged, Dr. Donohue and Tremain came quickly toward the scout, who said:

"Who fired at the man on the right?"

"I did," called out Tremain.

"Then you are avenged, Mr. Tremain, for the man will die," and Buffalo Bill had placed the wounded man in a more comfortable position, and was doing all he could to relieve him in his sufferings.

Dallas Donohue quickly knelt by the wounded man, and said in a kindly tone:

"My poor fellow, your wound is fatal, so if you have anything to say, let me urge you to speak now."

The man's eyes rested upon the face of one then another, until at last he said, faintly:

"I deserve my fate."

"It was the Giant Sport who sent us to kill and rob you men, and there is a secret I wish to tell you that——"

But he said no more, but after several convulsive shudders, and striving to speak, his head dropped back and he was dead.

CHAPTER X.

SILVER THREAD VALLEY.

Silver Thread Valley was a perfect garden of beauty in the midst of a wilderness.

The Silver Thread River ran through it for a distance of twenty miles, winding its way along, a clear stream flowing over a pebbly bottom, and indeed in the distance looking like a thread of silver embroidered in green velvet, for the banks, meadows and hill lands on either side were bright and beautiful in the first bloom of spring.

Into this valley had gone a number of well-to-do people to find homes, and adjacent to them were mining claims in the mountains, while upon the plains beyond were some ranches, each containing several hundred cattle and horses.

The most prominent man of the settlement was Judge Oswald Tremain, who has before been spoken of, and what he had left of his own fine fortune he had expended in making a new home for himself and family.

His cabin was a large one, well built, with incircling piazzas, and the judge had brought along over many a weary mile, furniture enough to furnish it well; also horses, cattle and domestic fowls, to make an ideal home in the wilds of the West.

The family of the judge consisted of his wife and daughter, Myrtle, a beautiful girl of eighteen, his son Allan being then on his way to his new home under the guidance of Buffalo Bill.

There was another member of the family, a young girl by the name of Blanche Vassar, and one more lovely in face and form it would have been difficult to find.

Blanche Vassar's life had had its shadows, rather than its sunshine, for her father had, years before, killed a man, as he asserted in self-defense, yet having no other proof than his word, and circumstantial evidence being against him, he had been tried, found guilty and sentenced to be hanged.

The trial was held before Judge Tremain, who plainly charged the jury that there was not proof sufficient to prove guilt; yet, in spite of this, the verdict had been brought in against Carl Vassar, and the sentence of death was passed upon him.

An appeal was taken, but again was the verdict the same, and Carl Vassar appeared to be doomed to die upon the gallows, when one night he mysteriously escaped from prison, and all search for him was in vain.

His fortune had been nearly swamped in his trials, and he left his wife and daughter a little home and a small income.

Blanche Vassar was the daughter of Carl Vassar, a friend of Judge Tremain. Being unjustly accused of murder, he had fled to the West, leaving his daughter to the care of Judge Tremain.

Soon after the judge lost his fortune and in his calamity there came to him a letter from Mexico.

It was from Carl Vassar, and told him that he was making a fortune there, that he had heard of the judge's misfortunes, and his intention was to go to the Far West, and he sent to him a map of a valley he knew of, and which was the very place to establish a settlement.

The letter also begged the judge to become the guardian of his child, to take her with him, and inclosed a draft for all expenses that might arise for Blanche.

At the suggestion of Carl Vassar, following the directions on the map, Judge Tremain had sought the valley he spoke of, his advice carrying thither the other settlers he was journeying westward with, and thus it was that Silver Thread became their abiding place, while, with a strong settlement near, miners began to hunt gold in the mountains nearby and cattlemen to establish ranches not far distant, where they could feel secure.

For a year the settlement had only the Indians to dread, and then sprung up a new evil in the bands of outlaws that began to raid the homes and lie in wait upon the trails.

As the evils grew worse, Judge Tremain had written a pleading letter to his old friend, Colonel Royall, at Fort Defiance, for help, with the result that one man, Buffalo Bill, was sent to the rescue to free the country of the lawless element.

But, before the arrival of Buffalo Bill matters grew rapidly worse, for the settlers who had formed a band of Vigilantes were being picked off by the outlaws, who had doomed them to die in revenge for having captured and hanged several of their lawless comrades.

Thus matters stood while Buffalo Bill and his two tenderfoot pards were wending their way toward Silver Thread Valley.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FUGITIVE'S DAUGHTER.

Since arriving at their new home, Blanche had received letters regularly from her father, and Judge Tremain had also heard from him often, and been asked to

build his cabin for him, the situation being a most beautiful one, which Carl Vassar had marked out on the map as his own.

It adjoined the ranch of the judge, and the plans sent for building the cabin were of quite an extensive kind, the fugitive saying in his last letter:

"I hope soon to be with you, and to enjoy the latter years of my life in my new home, for I have papers with me which will go to prove that I was falsely accused.

"My riches earned here in Mexico gave me the power to set the machinery in motion to prove my innocence, and I can demand a pardon of the governor, and live with no further dread upon me."

Looking forward to the coming of her father before many months, Blanche Vassar was a happy girl, and every afternoon was wont to mount her horse and ride the two miles to her new home to see how matters progressed there, for the judge was carrying out the plans of Mr. Vassar fully.

Generally Blanche was accompanied by Myrtle, but, the latter pleading a desire to help her mother, one afternoon, as her brother and his friend, Dr. Donohue, who was coming as the physician of the settlement, being almost daily expected, they were getting all in readiness for their arrival, as it was thought that a wagon train would soon come through with supplies from Trail End City.

So Blanche went alone, and after visiting the cabin, from which a grand view of the valley and its farms could be had, she started on a long ride back, going, as was her wont, by the trail that led her many miles around.

There were several places along this trail where she was miles from the nearest habitation, but, mounted upon her fleet and tireless white mare Snowflake, she had no fear, and was dashing swiftly along when suddenly out of a canyon dashed a horseman, who, seeing her, called loudly:

"Turn about for your life, miss.

"I am pursued by outlaws!"

Instantly Blanche wheeled her horse, but not to fly until the horseman dashed up to her side and cried:

"Quick! they are upon us!"

As he spoke there appeared in view several horsemen, mounted on black horses and dressed in black, while their faces were masked.

"The Boys in Black!"

"It is time to fly!" and Blanche, recognizing at a glance the scourge of the valley, laid the whip sharply upon Snowflake, just as several rifles sent bullets rattling after them.

"Cowards! to fire upon a woman! And they have wounded your horse, miss!" said the horseman, now dashing along by the side of Blanche, who, seeing his face deathly pale, and his hand pressed hard upon his side, where his clothes were stained crimson, cried:

"And you are wounded, sir!"

"It was given me some miles back, and I feel that it is serious—but we must ride faster—ah! your horse feels his wound as I feel mine," and the man seemed gasping for breath, while Snowflake, bleeding from a wound in her flank, was stumbling badly and not running with her accustomed speed.

"They have given up the chase, sir," cried Blanche, as she saw the pursuing horsemen come to a halt.

"And I, too, must halt, for I can go no farther, I——"

They dashed over a rise out of sight as the horseman spoke, and, reeling in his saddle, he suddenly fell heavily to the ground, while Blanche, in a vain effort to hold him up, felt Snowflake go down beneath her.

Nimble the young girl caught on her feet, and as she did so managed to grasp the rein of the stranger's horse, and, checking his speed quickly, threw the rein over the limb of a tree nearby and hastened back to the fallen man.

He lay upon his back, having twice attempted to rise after his fall, one hand clinched and pressed upon his wound, the other lying out limp by his side.

His face bore the hue of death, and, kneeling by his side, Blanche placed her gloved hand over his heart.

It seemed forever stilled; but the fingers of the girl touched a leather case which involuntarily she drew out from its resting-place by the wound, and, glancing at it, saw that it contained two photographs—one of her dead mother, the other of herself.

Then all her own danger was forgotten, all else but the fact that the man who lay dead at her feet was her own father.

She stared at the photographs as though she read there the story, for she had a similar likeness of her mother at home, and the one of herself had been taken when she was a little girl, and she also had one like it.

"My God! it is my father, and they have killed him.

"I did not know him, but did he not know me, I wonder?"

And, dropping down upon her knees by the form of her father, the fugitive's daughter buried her face in her hands, wholly unconscious that her foes were again coming in chase of her, having seen what had occurred from a distance.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PROTEST OF A BULLET.

Bent in sorrow over the dead form of her father, for Blanche Vassar's heart had told her that he was dead, she did not even hear the coming of the horsemen who had pursued her, and who had dealt her the cruel blow by slaying her father just as he was in sight of his new home, just as he was almost within reach of her welcome.

If she heard their coming, she did not heed.

Seeing this, they came on more slowly, gazing at the scene with their masks hiding all feeling of pity that might have welled up in their bosoms at the sight.

They were five in number, all mounted on jet black horses, while they were clad in black pants, shirts and sombreros, making a gloomy-looking lot, and defiantly wearing their garb, the emblem of their calling as outlaws, into the very midst of the settlement.

Nearer and nearer drew the murderers, until they halted within twenty paces of the young girl.

But still she moved not.

Then the leader dismounted, and as he advanced to within a few feet of Blanche, he paused and gazed upon her for fully a minute.

At last he spoke, and there was not an atom of pity in tone or words.

"A pretty picture, miss, but our time is precious and it must be broken in upon.

"I am sorry I have not my pencil and paper with me to sketch the scene, but I have not, and then, too, the grief is feigned—feigned to try and make us give up our prize."

She looked up, her eyes flashing, and said, almost fiercely, as she faced him:

"Feigned?"

"Can grief for a father be feigned?"

"A father?"

"Yes, my father, and you have murdered him."

"That man your father?"

"I tell you yes."

"Bah! Carl Vassar had a wife and child, but both are dead."

"It is a lie, for I, his daughter, am alive. Yes, and I shall live to yet avenge his cruel murder."

"A woman's threat is like a woman's vow of love, made to be broken."

"You insult me over the dead body of my father, whose name you but just now spoke?"

"Yes, I know him."

"Were it not that you but now spoke his name, I would not believe you."

"I tell you the truth, for I knew him years ago."

"Who are you?"

"The telling will not please you; that is, if you know anything of your father's past life, if you are, indeed, his daughter."

"I vow that I am his daughter, my name is Blanche Vassar, and I know all of his cruel past, for he was forced to fly to save himself from the gallows, his life being sworn away by those who he supposed would tell the truth, yet swore falsely to condemn him."

"I believe that you are his daughter."

"But then he has just come from Mexico, and he is well supplied with funds which I want and will have."

"We held him up, but he resisted, killing one of my men, and wounding another, who will also die, I fear."

"I hope so, for he deserved his fate," was the plucky response of Blanche Vassar.

"But a lasso dragged him from his saddle, and we captured and disarmed him."

"Then, when we did not expect it, he leaped into his saddle and was away."

"I fired to stop him, for I had recognized him as my old friend, Carl Vassar, but did not believe that I had hit him."

"Now, it seems, however, that my bullet was not so badly aimed and did the work I intended."

The man stepped closer as he spoke, and as she drew back in horror from his touch he called out to one of his men:

"Seize her!"

With a leap the man sprang to her side and grasped her rudely by the arm.

But as he did so there came the crack of a rifle at long range, and the man dropped in his tracks, while Blanche Vassar drew the knife from his belt as he fell dead at her feet and stood at bay facing the masked Boys in Black.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SHOT AT LONG RANGE.

"In an hour more, pards, we will be down in the Silver Thread Valley, and I have a treat in store for you in just one minute—now see there!"

Buffalo Bill, as he spoke, had neared the top of the range that looked down into Silver Thread Valley.

It was the day following their adventure at Lookout Mound, and they had been delayed in burying the dead outlaws who had left Trail End City to ambush and kill them, for Buffalo Bill never allowed even a redskin's body to go without decent burial, for, as he said:

"Death cancels all hatred, and they are human beings who demand of us the same treatment we would hope for for ourselves."

The party had journeyed along at a good gait, though they had an additional horse to lead, and, remembering the view he would surprise his companions with, Buffalo Bill had said what he did.

When the two young men beheld the valley, with the river running indeed like a silver thread through it, and dotting the landscape here and there the homes of the settlers, they were spellbound with admiration.

"I do not know just where your father is located, Mr. Tremain, for I have not been here since the valley has been settled."

"There is a group of cabins up toward the upper end, and I suppose the store, the meeting-house and blacksmith shop are there—my glass will tell me—and the trail leads there after we have gotten down into the valley."

Turning his field-glass upon the distant group of cabins, Buffalo Bill continued:

"Yes, I suppose that is what they call the village of Silver Thread City, for they have a way out here of putting city even to a mining-camp, for instance, Trail End City, with its five hundred souls."

"Yes; I see some very fine houses scattered about, and which one could hardly expect to find in so new a community."

"Turn your glasses upon the one on the slope, miles away on the right, and there is another this side, which appears to be just being built, for I see men working there."

"It will take us until night, so shall we ride on?"

The young men were loud in their praise of the beauty of the scenery, and as they rode on down into the valley expressed their admiration.

At length they came to a rise, and the scout suddenly drew rein before going over.

"See anything suspicious, scout?" asked Allan Tremain, and he, too, halted, while Dr. Dallas Donohue remarked:

"If it is to be another fight, I hope it will be with Indians, for we have had a couple of brushes with outlaws, and I have a consuming curiosity to behold a wild savage on the warpath."

"Sh! there is trouble ahead."

"Dismount, hitch your horses, and keep out of sight,"

The command and the serious manner of the scout made the two young men at once obey, and when they came near Buffalo Bill they saw that he was very attentively regarding some scene through his glass.

"There is trouble ahead," he said.

"What is it, scout?"

"If I mistake not, there has been an ambush of some one, for I see a dead man and a dead body, a woman in riding habit, and some forms clad in black, and I have heard that the road agents on these trails call themselves the Boys in Black; yes, and, by Heaven, they are masked!"

The scout seemed to be at fault as to just what was to be done, and the young men, peering through their glasses, the three sheltered by some pines, saw what he had pointed out, and Allan Tremain remarked:

"Yes, they are clad in black, and masked, as I can plainly see."

"And I count five of them, and one woman, while a man's form lies near, apparently dead," added Dr. Donohue.

"If the woman is in trouble, Mr. Cody, we ought to go to her aid," Allan Tremain said, while Dr. Donohue quietly rejoined:

"Yes, indeed, for odds against us are not to be counted where a woman demands our help."

"Good for you, pard!"

"I like your grit, and you bet we will help her out—ha! one of them has grasped the woman's arm; it is a risky shot at such long range, but I'll try it," and Buffalo Bill threw his rifle to his shoulder, took quick aim and pulled trigger.

CHAPTER XIV.

FOR A WOMAN'S SAKE.

At the words and act of Buffalo Bill, the two friends glanced quickly toward each other.

They were evidently anxious at the risk he was taking at a shot at such long range, and which he had acknowledged.

They saw that the group they were watching were close together, and in the midst of the black-garbed forms was a woman, and it must be that she was at their mercy.

Could it be that Buffalo Bill, and at the range of five hundred yards could kill the one at whom he aimed and not hit another, an innocent one?

It did not seem possible, and they were about to remonstrate, but they saw that the woman was in terror of the man and already was the scout's rifle-butt against his shoulder, his piercing eye glancing along the barrel.

They dared not speak then, and stood in breathless suspense, watching him, not the effect of his shot.

It was a quick aim that he took, appallingly quick, thought Tremain and Donohue, when so much depended upon it, and with the crack of the rifle the eyes of all were strained for a glance at the result.

There was no exclamation of triumph from the scout's lips, for he seemed to know his power, to have felt just what he could do; but both Tremain and Donohue gave vent to a fervent ejaculation of thanksgiving at the result, followed by a shout of triumph as they saw the man who had attacked the woman drop in his tracks as though dead.

They saw also the woman bend quickly, seize his knife from his belt and stand at bay, and they beheld the masked men, startled by the shot and its deadly result, look in the direction from whence it had come and then bound toward their horses.

They heard the command:

"We must fly, but we take that girl with us, men!"

At the words, Buffalo Bill, who was turning toward his horse, wheeled quickly and called out:

"No, but you shall not take her with you!"

Again his rifle went to his shoulder, once more there was a quick aim and the report followed.

"I hope I got the leader, for he is the one I want, but I do not know, so picked one at random," said Buffalo Bill.

"You got your man, though, for another has gone down," cried Tremain, exultantly.

"Yes, that makes three men now—three to three," Donohue called out, and the three bounded to their horses, for they saw Buffalo Bill preparing to mount.

"Now come for that brave woman's sake," cried the scout, and he dashed over the ridge with one of his wild war-cries that fairly startled his companions and awakened a hundred echoes in the valley.

The masked boys in black had obeyed their chief, in that they had made another effort to seize Blanche Vassar, who, with the bowie-knife she had seized from the belt of the fallen outlaw, stood at bay as Buffalo Bill, from beyond the ridge, was preparing to fire again.

One of the men nearest to her, and who was preparing to rush in and grasp her uplifted arm was the recipient of the second long range shot from Buffalo Bill.

Seeing him fall the leader uttered a savage oath and hissed forth the words:

"I will take you with me, girl, or die trying."

He was preparing to make good his boast when the wild war-cry of Buffalo Bill came to his ears, and his men, seeing the scout dash over the ridge, fled to their horses in terror and threw themselves into their saddles, one of them calling out:

"Remember where you are, chief

"Fly, or we are lost!"

But the one he addressed seemed determined to carry out his threat, and made a move toward Blanche Vassar, while he called out sternly:

"Down with that knife, girl!"

"No, I shall kill you with it if you touch me," was the firm reply.

The man saw that she was in earnest, he saw that she was in a dangerous mood and had the pluck to execute her threat.

She was not awkward in handling her knife, and stood at bay a beautiful picture, but a dangerous one, and he hesitated.

A glance showed him that the horseman coming over the ridge was not alone, as he had suspected was the case.

One, two others followed, and there might be more.

His men were already flying for their lives, and he knew that it was death for him to remain.

"Another time, my beauty, we will meet again," he shouted savagely, and with a bound had reached his horse.

In an instant he was in the saddle, his splendid horse flying away with him, while a few moments after up dashed Buffalo Bill followed by his two companions.

"She has fainted, doctor.

"See to her both of you, while I give those fellows a run for it," shouted Buffalo Bill, and he sped on like the wind.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FIRST VOLUNTEER.

"You're a doctor, Donohue, so your place is here.

"I'll go with the scout," shouted Allan Tremain as he reached the scene of the tragedy.

And he drove his spurs deep into the flanks of his horse in pursuit of Buffalo Bill, who had disappeared over a hilltop, a couple of hundred yards away, in rapid chase of the Boys in Black.

It was the wish of Dallas Donohue to push on also in pursuit, to go where he supposed there would be an encounter and his good right arm needed, and he momentarily resented the words of his friend.

But then his eyes fell upon the form of the young girl, and near her lay the others, while her dead horse was not far distant, as he saw by its having a side-saddle on.

Then his sympathy was aroused, and, leaping from his saddle, he threw the rein over the limb of the tree, to which Blanche had fastened her father's horse, and approached the spot where, when the danger was over, the young girl had fallen in a death-like faint.

Kneeling by her side, he felt her pulse, drew off her gloves, and then stepping quickly to his saddle, returned with a leather case of medicines.

It was not very long before, under his efforts to restore her, she showed signs of returning consciousness, and she heard the kindly spoken words:

"Have no fear, for you are with friends now, and your foes are gone."

She opened her eyes and looked straight into his face, while she obeyed when he said:

"Take a swallow of this, for you need it."

He handed her the cup off his silver flask with brandy in it.

She then spoke, asking:

"Who are you?"

"Dallas Donohue, a physician, come to Silver Thread to practice, and anxious to be of service to you, miss."

"Dr. Dallas Donohue!

"You are the friend of Allan Tremain?" she said, quickly.

"Yes, indeed, and he will soon be here."

"I have heard much of you from Allan's letters to his parents and sister, for I am Judge Tremain's ward, Blanche Vassar."

"Ah, Miss Vassar! and I have heard much of you through Allan's letters from home.

"I am delighted, indeed, to meet you, though I regret to find you under the circumstances that I do."

"Alas! far more than you can know, for there lies my poor father, slain by those cruel, cowardly outlaws, from whom you rescued me.

"When they left the reaction came and I swooned away; but I owe so much to you, Dr. Donohue."

"Indeed, you owe me nothing whatever, Miss Vassar, for I am like the fifth wheel of a coach in this affair, for your rescuer is the man who has at long range killed those two black-robed men, and has now gone off in chase of the others, leaving me to care for you, as did Allan Tremain also, for he wished to help the scout."

"To whom do you refer, Dr. Donohue, as the one to whom I am so deeply indebted?" asked Blanche, while her beautiful eyes were filled with tears.

"I refer to the man who was our guide here from the end of the stage line, and who came to see Judge Tremain, sent by the commandant of the fort, to down the outlaws that have been cursing this valley by their deeds— There, perhaps I have said too much."

"Oh, no, for I knew that Judge Tremain was expecting help from the fort, and how glad am I that it has come, for a company of soldiers will soon put down outlawry here, and avenge the red deeds done."

"A company of soldiers, Miss Vassar, why bless your sweet soul, there is only one man."

"One man?"

"Then there is no hope for us."

"Yes, indeed, there is, for that one man is worth a company of soldiers at the work to be done here, and when I tell you that it is Buffalo Bill, you will understand just what he can do."

"Buffalo Bill? I have heard so much of him, yes, he is said to bear a charmed life, and to be a most wonderful man."

"He is all of that. Well, he it was who killed these two men at long range, and he is now chasing the others, while he told Allan Tremain and myself, that he had been sent to run down the outlaws in Silver Thread Valley, and intended to do so, and he will, for I heard him vow to avenge the settlers."

"But he is only one man, Dr. Donohue."

"Oh, yes, but one man who will do as he pledges himself to do."

"But then he intends to raise a company of Volunteer Vigilantes, among the picked men of the settlement, so he told us, and he will then not be alone in the work."

"A company of Volunteer Vigilantes will not be readily found in Silver Thread Valley, Dr. Donohue, after the experience the Vigilantes here have had the past year— Ah! there comes some one."

"It is Buffalo Bill now, and Allan Tremain," and as the two rode up and dismounted, Dr. Donohue introduced them to Blanche, who extended her hand warmly to each and in silence, to then break out suddenly with:

"I am told, sir, that you are to raise a company of Vigilantes to put down outlawry in this valley."

"I have a wrong to avenge and I offer myself as your first volunteer."

CHAPTER XVI.

BUFFALO BILL'S PLEDGE.

There was admiration in the glance that Buffalo Bill cast upon Blanche Vassar at her words, offering to be the first volunteer to the band of Vigilantes which the scout was going to organize to put down the outlaws of Silver Thread Valley.

"I accept your services, Miss Vassar, with much pleasure, for if you cannot be one of our active members in the field, you can at least be the Mascot of the Vigilantes," said the scout.

"I thank you, sir, but there is more for me to do than become the good-luck number, as I have a duty to perform in hunting down the murderer of my father and seeing him brought to justice, but I feel that in your hands all will be done that is possible."

"My father I had not seen for years, not since I was

seven years of age, and he left home under a cloud, and my mother died, leaving me alone in the world, save for Judge Tremain, his wife and daughter, who are most dear to me.

"To-day my father was returning to me, and I came upon him suddenly flying from the outlaws, from whom he had escaped.

"Of course, I did not know him, nor am I certain that he knew me, but he turned me back from danger, the outlaws fired upon us, and my father received a bullet in his body which soon proved fatal, while my horse was wounded.

"Do you wonder that I am revengeful, that I tell you I will gladly become one of the members of your Vigilante band?"

"No, Miss Vassar, I do not wonder at your just feeling of revenge."

"And let me say, Mr. Cody, that I, too, offer my services as a volunteer Vigilante of your band, Miss Vassar having put us to shame by setting the example," said Allan Tremain.

"Count me in also as a volunteer, Mr. Cody; for I gladly follow in the wake of Miss Vassar and my friend Tremain," said Dr. Donohue.

"It will not take me long to recruit a company at this rate, I see; but let me explain, Miss Vassar, that I came here for the work of running down the outlaws, and I so told these gentlemen.

"I made known to them the fact that I had determined to organize a secret band of Vigilantes, taking only picked men and not too many.

"Let me explain to you that I came here in partial disguise, I am not to be known as Buffalo Bill, and I wish to remain unknown, save to Judge Tremain and those intimately associated with him.

"I have heard much of this leader of the Boys in Black, as they call themselves, and there is a large price set upon his head, dead or alive, for his crimes.

"No blacker, more cruel and cowardly crime can he have been guilty of than to fire upon you and take your father's life, and I pledge you my word, Miss Vassar, that the Mascot of the Volunteer Vigilantes will avenge your father's death tenfold.

"These gentlemen know well what has been the doom of those who belonged to the Vigilante band in this valley, but that has not deterred them from following your example and becoming volunteers, and it is just what I expected of them, though they are new to this country and out here are called tenderfeet; but now let me urge that you ride on with Mr. Tremain and Dr. Donohue, while I remain here on guard until Judge Tremain sends after your father's body, and to bury these two outlaws. I regret that there are not more but my horse went lame, and so I gave up the chase.

"I will put your saddle and bridle upon one of these horses of the outlaws."

Buffalo Bill hastily did this, and, being urged to go on with them, by Allan Tremain and the doctor, Blanche decided to do so, and the scout was left alone with the dead.

It was nearly two hours before the rumble of wheels was heard, and Judge Tremain himself came up with an ambulance and several men, to carry the body of Carl

Vassar on to his home, and bury the outlaws where they had fallen.

Buffalo Bill saw in the judge a fine-looking gentleman of fifty-five, who greeted him most warmly and said:

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Cody, and as my old friend Royall could not send me a troop of cavalry, I am glad that he sent me a man who can accomplish more than any one else that I know of in this most deadly work.

"You will ride back with me now, Mr. Cody, and my men will follow more slowly with the ambulance bearing the body of poor Vassar, whose death is a bitter blow to us all, and especially to his noble daughter."

"I have pledged my word to Miss Vassar, Judge Tremain, to avenge him, yes, and the other victims of the outlaws' merciless deeds of blood, and I shall keep my word, sir, or leave my band of scouts to avenge me, as I know they will," was Buffalo Bill's firm response, as he started with the judge for the ride to Hope Vale Ranch.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MAN WITH A SECRET.

Carl Vassar was buried from the home of his old friend, Judge Tremain.

The whole settlement knew Blanche Vassar, and, learning that her father had been killed by the road agents in sight of his own home, and just as he was coming to dwell there, the sympathy of all went out to the young girl, and the settlers came from far and near to the funeral.

The miners too had heard the sad news, and came down from the mountains in force, while the ranchers were well represented from beyond the range, and only the death of Judge Tremain or a call to arms could have brought out so many people.

Then, too, there were strangers there, for the young son of Judge Tremain had arrived, just from college, and he was to be the teacher of the valley school.

He had been accompanied by his friend, Dr. Dallas Donohue, for the settlers had asked the judge to write East and get them a physician, as the only one in the valley was advancing in years, and he wished to give up practice.

But all were impressed with the friend of Judge Tremain who had come to the valley, it was said, to settle there.

He was a Western man, rumor had it, had served in the army and knew wild life well, and wanted to make his home in the settlement.

His striking appearance, genial and courteous manners, added to a certain dignity of mien, impressed all most favorably and all sought to know him, and the two young men who also came in for their share of admiration.

Judge Tremain had introduced his friend as "Captain Cody," and the claim upon the settlement the stranger had would have rendered him popular at once, for young Tremain and Dr. Donohue had told how he had come to their rescue at Trail End City, and had guided them to the valley, which he had known years before when serving in the army.

The ambush prepared for them had been told of also, as well as the fact of having found the settler tied to his

horse and placarded with a warning for others, and the four manacled forms lying at Lookout Mound.

To these services rendered by "Captain Cody," was the rescue of Blanche Vassar, and the driving off of the Boys in Black.

"He has said, my friends, that this lawlessness must cease in this valley, that the outlaws must be taught a serious lesson, and we must not be cowed by the fact that they have put to death every one of our Vigilante band organized to hunt them down.

"You have asked me to serve as your chief, but I yield to a better man, one whose record I know, whose worth I appreciate, and I name Captain Cody as the leader of a new band of Vigilantes, for he has already avowed his determination to form one."

So said Judge Tremain, who had called a meeting of the settlers after the funeral of Carl Vassar.

Continuing, he went on to say:

"Captain Cody, moved by the scenes of outlawry he has already seen here, and wishing to avenge our comrades and punish the guilty ones, has already started to raise a company of Vigilantes, and so far he has three members, one of whom is none other than Miss Blanche Vassar, my ward, and who is to be the mascot of the band.

"He calls only for volunteers, wishes unmarried men alone to join him, and asks for but twenty-five all told, a chief, two officers, a surgeon, and the fair mascot.

"Captain Cody has already arranged for a home in our midst, for he will dwell at Solace Lodge, as poor Mr. Vassar had written his daughter to name their home.

"As this ranch is most central, Dr. Donohue will make his home there for the present, until he can get suited for himself, and there you will find him, and let me say that he comes splendidly recommended as both a physician and surgeon.

"Now, friends, those of the young men who wish to join Captain Cody's band of Volunteer Vigilantes, know where to find him, and he wishes to begin work at once to put a check upon further bloodshed and depredations in our midst.

"Let me further state that the Volunteer Vigilantes will also have an eye upon the Indians—in fact, be at once our scouts and guards.

"Here comes the captain now, so give him a welcome as the Chief of the Vigilantes."

Just then Buffalo Bill, a man with a history known over all the earth, but unknown personally to those of the settlement, and who determined to keep his identity a secret as long as he could, rode up to join Judge Tremain, and the welcoming cheers that greeted him were a surprise, and caused him, while raising his hat and bowing his thanks, to blush like a schoolgirl at the honor done him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR ALLY.

"Ah! and Indians, too?"

So said Buffalo Bill, as he was scouting along the range overlooking the Silver Thread, making himself familiar with the old scenes he had known years before when scouting there.

He had been one week only in his new home, and had taken possession of Solace Lodge, the home of Carl Vassar, which had been completed just in time.

It was supposed in the settlement that he had bought the ranch from Blanche, as her father had been killed, and the idea was to let the settlers so believe who were not in the secret, for if it got out that Buffalo Bill was in the valley and had come to hunt down the outlaws, the chance to capture them would be destroyed, as it would be thought that he was backed by some secret force.

Judge Tremain had stocked the ranch with cattle and horses for Mr. Vassar, and so the cowboys on the place were simply told to transfer their allegiance to Captain Cody, the new master, and they did.

Dr. Donohue had taken up his quarters there at Buffalo Bill's request, and the two friends were getting along splendidly together, the young physician being kept busy, for nearly every settler's family seemed to suddenly develop an ache or a fever just to test the skill of the new physician.

The band of Volunteer Vigilantes had been raised the very first day, in fact, twice as many men could have been secured, but Buffalo Bill stuck to his original intention of twenty-five all told, organizing another band, however, as a reserve force to draw upon, as he said, significantly:

"We will need others to call upon to supply the places of those made vacant by death."

Carter Kent, a young settler, had been made first lieutenant of the band, and, out of courtesy to his father, Allan Tremain was appointed second lieutenant, with Dr. Donohue as surgeon, and Blanche Vassar as mascot and color-bearer, for she had at once embroidered them a fighting flag, a rather ghastly one with a red hand holding scales of justice, with the words:

"RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE."

Beneath was the lettering in silver thread:

"VOLUNTEER VIGILANTES."

"You must fight the Boys in Black under a flag of their own color," grimly said Blanche as she gave the colors to Buffalo Bill.

Buffalo Bill had been delighted with his band of volunteers, and found them to be a splendid lot of young fellows, magnificent riders, dead shots, men who could handle a lasso, follow a trail, and not one of whom stood less than six feet in his stockings.

"They are a band of heroes," the scout captain had said as he gazed at them sitting on their horses before him, clad in buckskin, wearing large sombreros and armed to the teeth.

He had originated a series of signals, by which he could call them together in a short while, and giving them their orders, had started alone upon his reconnoitering expeditions to see just what he could find out about the outlaws, their haunts and their members.

It was while scouting along the range that he suddenly came upon a sight which caused him to quickly dismount and creep to a ridge, over which he looked with his glass to his eyes.

What he saw was a white man in a canyon engaged

in fishing, while toward him, trying to get near enough to kill him, were three Indians, while half a dozen more were beyond the ridge holding the ponies of their comrades who had gone to get the scalp of the paleface.

"It may be a settler, it may be a road agent, but I will chip in and save him.

"If he is a road agent, I will have saved his life and have to take it later.

"It is a long-range shot, but I can make it," and so saying Buffalo Bill brought his rifle around, took quick aim, touched the trigger, and the redskin nearest the white man, and who was leaning over a rock to shoot him in the back, leaped into the air and fell headlong over the ridge within a couple of hundred feet of his intended victim.

As the other two sprang to their feet, Buffalo Bill fired a second time, and again an Indian went down while the third ran like a deer to rejoin his comrades.

Again the rifle cracked, and the scout saw the Indian leap into the air, then fall, but he sprang to his feet and ran on.

Again he pulled the trigger of his repeating rifle, and the bullet knocked up the dust at his feet.

Another shot must have clipped him from the way he jumped, but he gained the ridge, darted over and reaching his pony the party dashed away, the scout sending shot after shot flying in chase of them.

"Ho, pard, do I owe my life to you?"

Buffalo Bill turned and beheld standing near him a man over six feet in height and of massive frame.

His hair and beard were long and were as white as snow, while he was attired in a combination suit of buckskin and mountain lion skin.

He had a rifle of ancient date in his hand and a belt of arms was about his waist, his hat being made of a wolf's skin.

One glance at him and Buffalo Bill called out: "Great Scott! is it you, Nemesis Nat? I thought you were dead years ago?"

"You bet I ain't dead, Buffalo Bill, and darned glad am I to see you, while this ain't the first time I owe you my life.

"God bless you, pard, you thought I was dead, did ye?"

"No, no, I followed the Navahoes westward, you know, for I'm still gathering scalps, as you know what they done to me and mine.

"I'll just rope in them you has got for me to add to my string, for I know you never takes Injun hair," and the venerable-looking old avenger walked over to the two Indians and scalped them with a dexterity that showed long practice.

"Now, Bill, come right home with me, for I has a cave-ranch a few miles from here, and I wants ter entertain yer.

"I has a string of fish and plenty of game at home, so come right along, as I has something to tell you," and Buffalo Bill mounted his horse, for the old man was a most rapid walker and a tireless one, and followed him for several miles, until he passed up to the head of a canyon.

"There's grass for the pony, Bill, so stake him out while I set dinner agoin', and then come into the cave—watch me and see how I go."

Buffalo Bill obeyed, saw the old man climb up the rocks and disappear fifty feet above in a clump of pinons.

He soon followed and found himself in a large, dry cavern, of which the old man had made a home.

There was a fire there, and dinner was cooking—a buffalo-rib roast, some fish, hoeecake and coffee.

Upon the rocky walls hung a saddle and bridle, a pair of revolvers and numberless weapons, taken from redskins, while a buffalo robe in one corner and some blankets formed the couch of the strange man.

"Sit right there on that rock, and we'll soon have dinner," said Nemesis Nat, and in a short while dinner was ready and the two men, so strangely met, sat talking over the past when they had known each other, until at last Nemesis Nat said:

"I tell you, Buffalo Bill, that there is a secret in these mountains you would give your scalp to know."

CHAPTER XIX.

NEMESIS NAT.

"Yes, Bill, I ain't forgot yer, and never will," resumed the old man, going back to his remembrance of the scout quickly, as though he thought he had said too much in referring to a secret of those mountains that Buffalo Bill would give his scalp to know.

"Nor have I forgotten you, Nemesis Nat," answered the scout.

"But you ain't got the same reason for remembering me that I has you, for I remembers how you saved me from the Vigilantes on the Platte, who were going to hang me as a suspicious character, and yet the very men sitting in judgement upon me were cutthroats and fugitives from justice.

"I remember again when you tackled the three Sioux who had me prisoner and rescued me, saving me from being roasted alive.

"But, Pard Bill, I am no fugitive from justice. I did not come West with a crime upon my head and have to hide from the gallows.

"It may not look so to you now, but I was a gentleman once, yes, I was a minister of the Gospel, and had a happy home, a wife and children.

"I had some money, too, so gave my salary to the poor of the congregation, serving them from a desire to do good.

"But all was changed in a night, Bill, for a fine young stranger who had come to our town, and played the organ in my church, ran off with my beautiful daughter, the eldest of the family.

"She was sixteen then, and that was a cruel blow, for those I had preached morality and resistance to temptation to pointed to my child, for the man she had gone away with was married and it was found that he had urged her to take a thousand dollars of church money I had in the safe in the vestry-room, along with some rare old jewels belonging to her mother and worth a small fortune.

"I was reviled by those I had taught, the shame of her act was put upon me, my usefulness was gone, and so wife and I determined to pull up stakes and come where we were not known to any one.

"Well, Bill, I am telling you the same old story of

many an unfortunate settler, for one night when we had a lovely home, and all was going well with us, my four children were happy and I was educating them along with the other little ones of the settlement, the Navahoes swept down upon us.

"My wife was killed, my children, too, before my eyes, and I was badly wounded, scalped and left for dead—see, the scar yet remains here, but it is felt more here," and as he spoke he first showed among his thick, massy locks where the scalp-lock had been torn from his head, and then pressed his hand over his heart to reveal where the hurt was deepest.

"My home was burned, too, Bill, and I saw the bodies of my loved ones cast into the flames.

"I could do nothing, and prayed that I, too, might die.

"But my prayer was unanswered, and then suddenly there came over me a longing to live—to live to avenge the deed.

"I had not preached a sermon since my daughter went away, and I tell you that curses came to my lips where prayers had been uttered.

"How I got well I never knew; but I rallied and in time took the trail, going first as a scout at Fort Whipple.

"Then I took to the wilderness and began to avenge my wrongs upon the redskins, and you met me about that time.

"I lived for revenge, and the soldiers and miners called me Nemesis Nat, and I suppose I deserved the name; I know that I do now for I am only an avenger—I live for revenge.

"See, this cavern is my home, Buffalo Bill, and I am comfortable here, and you are the only one who knows where I dwell.

"I have money, plenty of gold hidden away, for the redskins did not get that, and when I need provisions and ammunition I go to the nearest fort or settlement.

"I am a back number, but I keep up with the most improved weapons, for I need them, Bill, in my business, for my mission now is to kill, to add to my string of scalps.

"I show you my record," and he arose and took down an appallingly long string of Navaho scalps, and remarked:

"They were all there—at the killing and cremation of my loved ones."

CHAPTER XX.

THE UNTOLD SECRET.

Buffalo Bill had listened with deepest interest to the strange and pitiful story of old Nemesis Nat.

He felt that grief, not age, had turned his hair and beard to a snowy hue, for he was scarcely over fifty-five or sixty, and as strong and athletic as though twenty years younger.

He had, indeed, had a sad life, and the scout could not blame him for having become a Nemesis.

He lived alone with his sorrow, and was a monomaniac upon the subject of scalp-taking.

In a different life memories of the cruel past would have driven him mad.

At last the scout said in a sympathetic tone:

"You always had my sympathy, Nemesis Nat, and I am glad that you told me your story.

"I am glad that you brought me here with you, for I feel that we can be pards and help one another, and I have something to tell you too; but I shall hope to see you in better quarters some day, and leading a different life."

"No, no, Bill, there is no other life for me to lead.

"I am an outcast, a rover of mountain and plain, a dweller away from my fellowmen, and my life is devoted to avenging my loved ones.

"Feeling as I do now, I would be glad to hunt down the man who destroyed the honor of my name and brought shame upon my beautiful child, the idol of our hearts and home.

"I would have done so, would have dogged him to justice, only her pitiful letter told us that she loved him and for harm to befall him meant death to her."

"And have you never heard from her."

"No."

"And do not know whether she is dead or alive?"

"I hope that she is dead, and God rest her soul and forgive her."

"Well, Nemesis Nat, let me tell you that I am here in the valley on a special mission, though you must keep the secret, as it is known only to a few interested ones."

"Who is there for me to tell it to, Bill, even did I care to betray you?"

"I spoke in a general way, Nemesis Nat, and I'll tell you what my mission is, and you can help me in it."

"I will do all in my power."

"It is to run down the outlaws known as the Boys in Black."

Buffalo Bill's keen eyes saw the man give a start at his words, and a sudden look of anxiety cross his face, but not appearing to notice it, he continued:

"You have heard of these outlaws, of course?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, their deeds have been so vile that I decided to come to this valley and see what could be done to free the settlers from the curse upon them," and the start and look he had seen made Buffalo Bill cautious now.

"And you intend to hunt them down?"

"I hope to do so."

"They are bad men."

"Yes, there never have been worse outlaws banded together on this frontier."

"Have you proof of this, Bill?"

"Yes, I have."

"What proof?"

"The proof of my own eyesight of what they have done."

"That should be the best of proof.

"But tell me of them."

Buffalo Bill told of the crimes of the Boys in Black, the long list of their red and cruel deeds, up to the killing of the last of the settler Vigilantes, the murder of Carl Vassar and the capture of his daughter.

The man listened with deepest attention to all, a pained look upon his face, and at last said:

"I would as soon doubt my hatred for redskins, Buffalo Bill, as your word; but this is a red list against the Boys in Black."

"Yes, and do you not think it is time they should be wiped out?"

"Yes."

"And you will be my ally, Nemesis Nat, will help me?"

"Bill, let me tell you something?"

"Yes."

"I know these Boys in Black, know their chief and their haunts."

"But I did not suspect them of being what you claim they are, for they have kept their red deeds hidden from me, and I only supposed that they held up wagon-trains, coaches, and robbed men of gold, not of life, and I had no means of knowing to the contrary, though when last at the fort for supplies I did hear hard stories told of their acts, but supposed all was overpointed."

"Now, Bill, you ask me to help you hunt them down, and I could do so, but let me tell you that they have been my friends, and they believe that I am theirs."

"I was wounded in a fight with Indians once, and they carried me to their retreat and cared for me most tenderly for months, while one of their number, a physician he had been, saved my life."

"Again, when a captive to the Navahoes, and about to be tortured to death, their chief, who is an ally of the redskins, demanded my release and secured it."

"The outlaws are masked, Bill, but I have seen the faces of all of them, and some strange magnetism draws me to their chief."

"They trust me and I will not betray them; but I shall not betray you either. I shall be neutral, yes, more, for they are evil, you are good, and I shall protect you when I can from them."

"The secret of their retreat and trails I will not tell, but I will protect you."

"More I cannot, will not, do, Bill."

CHAPTER XXI

A STRANGE SIGHT.

There was no doubt in the mind of Buffalo Bill but that Nemesis Nat had told him the whole truth about the road agents.

He felt assured that the old man felt bound to them by ties which would not allow him to betray them.

A man of honor, he yet could not uphold their acts, or take sides with them; but yet he would not, owing them all that he did of gratitude, betray them, forfeit their confidence in him in having taken him to their secret retreats.

The scout realized just how the old avenger was situated, how he felt about it, and he would not urge him to aid him.

But he was sure that the outlaws would not be informed of his intending to hunt them down, that they would not be warned that Buffalo Bill was upon their trail, while if he could save his, the scout's life, there was no doubt but what he would do so.

Nemesis Nat intended to remain neutral, as he had said, with a leaning toward aiding the scout, and with this Buffalo Bill must be satisfied, he felt.

"Can you conscientiously, Nemesis Nat, give me any particulars regarding these road agents?"

"Ask what you wish, Bill, and I will answer as I deem just to both sides."

"How many men are in the band?"

"All of seventy-five, but they are scattered, and, being on friendly terms with the Indians, they are strong in that, where they can retreat for safety to the camps of the redskins."

"They have their secret retreat, though?"

"They have their secret camps."

"And are under the leadership of a man who is a very capable commander?"

"Oh, yes; I consider him a very remarkable man."

"He has the power of life or death over his men, and has ironclad laws for them to follow, allowing no deviation from them."

"Will you describe him to me?"

"No, for you are liable to meet him at any time, and he is one to recognize from a description."

"Why do they go masked?"

"To avoid being seen in an attack, and recognized afterward, when the recognition might be fatal."

"Why dress in black?"

"It is a fad with them, as is also their riding black horses."

"The Boys in Blue, the soldiers, were at one time their most earnest foes, and they simply took the name of Boys in Black, though they do not commit their lawless acts now near a fort or post."

"Who are they mostly?"

"Mostly, I should say, men driven to seek safety by coming West, for crimes they have been guilty of."

"Some have been cattlemen, others miners, a few settlers, and still more the hangers-on about camps, a deserter or two from the army, and, in fact, men of all degrees of crime and occupation."

"They are cunning as Indians, well armed and splendidly mounted, and from what you tell me of them, and I regret to hear, they are a cruel and merciless lot who deserve capture and punishment, though I will do nothing to bring it upon them, yet, as I said, I will do nothing to protect them, because they are lawless, and everything to protect you, as you represent right and justice."

"Can I say more, Bill?"

"Indeed you cannot, Nemesis Nat, and I thank you, while I will also place confidence in you."

"I am in this work to stay, and I tell you frankly I shall run these outlaws down, some of them to death by bullet, others to die at the rope's end, and more to suffer punishment by imprisonment for their evil deeds."

"I shall show them no mercy, and heart, hand and life I am in the cause to stay to the end of the trail."

"Now I must be off, for I have made you a long visit, but I am going to tell you where you can find me, and we must be good friends, Nemesis Nat, while I shall expect one thing of you, and that is, that where you know that the innocent are going to suffer at the hands of these fiends, you will at least give me a warning that will prevent death and ruin which one word from you could have averted."

"I will promise this, Bill," answered Nemesis Nat, and he went with Buffalo Bill to his horse.

Mounting, Buffalo Bill rode on his way, and returning later by the trail which he had seen the Indians on, he

came upon a strange scene, for there stood Nemesis Nat at the head of an open grave in which were the bodies of the two redskins, while in his deep voice he was repeating over them the service for the dead.

"I intended to bury them myself, but he has done so—what a strange man," and Buffalo Bill rode on unseen by Nemesis Nat in his humane act to the dead Indians.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LASSO-THROWER.

Buffalo Bill was much impressed with his long interview with the man whose life was that of an avenger.

"I am glad that I saved his life, and I have discovered much by my talk with him.

"He will do as he says in my behalf, but nothing could make him betray the outlaws, after the debt of gratitude he owes them.

"He is as true as steel to friend or foe.

"This trail will lead me by the house of Judge Tremain, so I will return that way," and Buffalo Bill turned off of the trail he had been following, into one that branched off to the right.

He was within a mile of the home of Judge Tremain, when he suddenly reined his horse to a halt.

It was just on the summit of a ridge, and he forced his horse back over it, as his eyes fell upon a scene of deep interest for him.

The burying-ground of the valley was a most picturesque spot, a meadow under a massive rock that towered aloft like a mighty monument.

It was on the banks of the Silver Thread, and there was a natural grove there.

Here had been buried the dead of the settlement, and there were a number of new graves that marked the last resting-place of those who had been victims of the Boys in Black.

One grave there was apart from the others, and this was where Carl Vassar had been buried.

Each day since his death Blanche had gathered wild flowers, and, riding the three miles that lay between Hope Vale Ranch and the burying-ground, had gone to his grave.

It was Blanche that Buffalo Bill now saw, and she was spreading flowers upon the grave, while her horse cropped grass near her.

All unconscious that there was a human being within two miles of her, Blanche was wrapped up in her work of love.

But there was one near who saw that danger threatened her.

A horseman had come slowly along the trail toward the burying-ground and halted in the shadow of Monument Rock, where he had dismounted.

What Buffalo Bill saw from the ridge was this man leave his horse, and, with lasso in hand, creep cautiously toward the spot where Blanche knelt, shielding himself as well as he could by intervening trees.

The scout was within very easy range of his rifle, but he did not think of using it, as he said:

"I must catch that fellow alive."

He could have called out to Blanche of her danger, could have ridden over the ridge and put the man to

flight; but his horse had had a long ride and was tired, and he was not sure of overtaking the man upon the animal he then had.

Then, too, night was not very far distant, and the man might elude him in the darkness.

So Buffalo Bill decided to dash around the ridge, descend to the meadow, and await the man by Monument Rock when he came there with his captive, for he was sure that he intended to kidnap Blanche, as he recalled the threat she said the chief of the Boys in Black had made to her.

So Buffalo Bill rode rapidly along the ridge out of sight, until he came to a water-wash leading down to the meadow, and in five minutes more he had concealed his horse in a pine thicket and was standing by the side of the animal of the man he had seen.

It did not take him but a minute more to find cover behind a boulder, and, unswinging his lasso, he crouched down ready to throw it at the time when it was needed, muttering to himself:

"I'll give him a dose of his own poison."

In the meanwhile the man had glided over the quarter of a mile that lay between the spot where he had left his horse and where Blanche was, all unconscious of her danger in the sad memories that crowded upon her.

She had placed the fresh wild flowers upon the grave, and was kneeling with bowed head, and her hands clasped, while nearer and nearer crept the man as stealthily as a coyote.

"Oh, if he could have only lived, how happy would we have been in our home!" she murmured.

As the words left her lips there was a "swish" in the air, a blow, and the lariat had coiled about her and drawn taut, pinning her arms to her sides, while, springing to her feet, she was dragged to the ground again with a heavy fall.

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNLOOKED-FOR AID.

In vain did Blanche seek to free her arms, and strive to grasp a revolver she had carried in her belt since her last adventure.

The man who had caught her in the toils was an expert hand with a lariat and quickly had it coiled about her beyond all resistance.

"What do you mean by this outrage?" she cried, indignantly, as he took the revolver from her belt and then secured her beyond all resistance.

"Keep that pretty mouth of yours closed, miss, or I'll have to use a gag on you, for my kind are not popular in this settlement, and, though folks is few and far between, the yell o' a lovely gal can be heard a long way off."

"I'll keep quiet if you do not gag me.

"But why have you made me a prisoner?" she said, appealingly.

She saw before her an athletic, wiry fellow, dressed as a miner, and with top-boots and a slouch hat.

His face was bearded, cruel in expression, and Blanche required but one glance into it to feel that she would appeal in vain for mercy to that man.

But it struck her that she might appeal to his love of

gain, and what he would not do from a sense of mercy, he might do for gold.

So she said, quietly:

"Why do you not answer me?"

"What do you mean by this outrage?"

"I am not acting for myself, miss, but for another."

"Ah! you have a master, then, whom you commit crime for?"

"Don't put it that way, for I have no master."

"Then you are paid for your work?"

"You bet I am!"

"Who is your master?"

"I said I don't like the name of master."

"All right, who hires you for this work?"

"You'll know, I guess, sooner than you wish."

"Where is he?"

"Up in the mountains."

"It is the man who killed my father, at whose grave you have committed this crime, as he did over his dead body."

"It is the vile chief of the band of outlaws known as the Boys in Black?"

"You guesses well."

"How much does he pay you for your work?" quietly asked Blanche.

"Big money."

"What do you call big money?"

"A cool thousand dollars?"

"Then you commit crime for pay?"

"About that."

"And you are for sale to the highest bidder?"

"That depends."

"Upon what?"

"How big the sum is that is offered."

"Suppose I offer you fifteen hundred dollars if you will release me?"

"Have you got your money with you?"

"No, of course not."

"How could you pay it?"

"I suppose you know who I am?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Miss Vassar."

"That is your father in that grave you were putting flowers on."

"I was with the chief the day he killed him and caught you, and we were run off by a gang of settlers."

"Then, as you know me, you must be aware that if I promise you fifteen hundred dollars I am able to pay it."

"Seeing is believing."

"You doubt me?"

"I want the money, and you have not got it with you."

"I will pledge you my word to meet you here at this time to-morrow and give you the money, for I have it, gold my father had with him when he came from Mexico."

"And which we missed?"

"Yes."

"Well, I can't take your word, miss, though no doubt you mean what you say."

"I've got you and you must go with me, so I'll get your horse and bring him here for you to mount."

"If you will trust me I will give you two thousand dollars in gold."

"If you had the money with you, miss, I'd take it and light out quickly, for it would never do to let the chief know I sold myself."

"No, you must go with me."

He walked over to where her horse was feeding near Monument Rock, and, catching the animal, led it back to where he had left her.

But as he drew near to where Blanche stood, the picture of despair, a horseman suddenly dashed out of a *pinon* thicket behind the young girl, there was the crack of a revolver and the self-confessed outlaw dropped in his tracks.

But it was not Buffalo Bill who had fired the shot.

It was the Mysterious Man in Blue.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RESCUER.

It was a glad cry that broke from the lips of Blanche Vassar, as she stood there by the grave of her father, the lariat of her captor wrapped closely around her, when suddenly there dashed into view a horseman, one who came to her rescue.

She turned at the rapid clatter of hoofs just in time to see him level his revolver and pull trigger.

She saw the kidnaper leap into the air and fall heavily upon his face, as though killed on the instant.

She had heard of the Mysterious Man in Blue, and the one she now beheld before her she was certain was no other than he.

She saw a splendid horse, with Mexican saddle and bridle, richly ornamented with silver, and a lariat hanging from the horn.

The rider riveted her gaze and commanded her admiration in spite of herself.

The rider was the same handsome, debonair Man in Blue who had come to the rescue of Buffalo Bill, Dr. Donohue and Allan Tremain in Trail End City, and whose word had been law to the wild element under the leadership of the Giant Sport, Circus Sam.

He sprang from his saddle, and, with sombrero in hand, his long golden hair hanging in wavy masses upon his shoulders, he approached Blanche, his blue costume even more elegant than the one he had worn at Trail End City.

"I am sorry to find you in trouble, lady, and will quickly release you from those bonds," he said, in his low voice, full of melody.

"You have saved me, sir, from one whom that man was the tool of, the chief of the outlaws known as the Boys in Black, and without my expressing my gratitude, you can feel how much I appreciate your act and the risk you took on my account."

"Do not speak of it, lady, for a man who would not risk his life for a lady is a despicable thing indeed."

And the Man in Blue was quickly unwrapping the coils of the lasso from about the form of Blanche, who said:

"You are he whom they call the Mysterious Man in Blue, are you not?"

"Yes; but my name is Ford Belfont, miss."

"You recognize me by my clothing, I suppose, as the most distinguishing feature?"

"I have heard of you, sir, and of your costume, which is certainly picturesque, if odd."

"Thanks. I have a fancy for blue and silver, and humor myself in it.

"You are Miss Blanche Vassar, I take it?"

"And may I ask how you recognized me, sir? for I do not recall that we have met before."

"By your beauty, which has not been misrepresented," was the frank response, and yet so respectfully said that Blanche could not feel offended, but blushed visibly, while she said:

"When you see my adopted sister, Myrtle Tremain, you will see one who is indeed beautiful, and may I not ask you to escort me to Hope Vale Ranch, that you may tell Judge Tremain of the tragedy here, for he is dead, is he not?"

And Blanche glanced timidly toward the outlaw lying some paces distant, just as he had fallen.

Without appearing to hear her last remark, he said:

"Yes, Miss Tremain is very beautiful, for I saw her once; but she is a blonde, and being one myself, I like the opposite type of beauty.

"Yes, this man is dead, for I shot to kill, and I will escort you home with pleasure, Miss Vassar, as it is growing late, and you should not ride alone.

"Permit me to help you to your saddle."

He led her horse up and with courtly grace aided her to mount, when, leaping into his own saddle without using the stirrup, they turned toward the ranch of Judge Tremain, Blanche remarking:

"Must he be left there?"

"Oh, yes, I'll see to having him buried upon my return, for my ranch is just beyond the range a few miles."

"I heard that you had a home in Silver Thread."

"Yes, I have several homes, for I am a roving gold-hunter, Miss Vassar, seeking my fortune where I can find it," and they rode on in a rapid gallop.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SCOUT SURPRISED.

Buffalo Bill waited patiently for the coming of the outlaw to his horse, accompanied by his captive.

But, as half an hour passed and the man did not appear, for he should have been there, certainly having had ample time to capture the maiden and bring her there, Buffalo Bill began to grow anxious.

What the delay meant he could not understand, and he at last decided to reconnoiter, when suddenly he saw the man come into view.

He was walking rapidly along and going straight toward his horse.

Then the right arm of the scout began to move in a circle, the lasso-coil grasped in the unerring hand, while his face grew stern as he wondered what had become of the maiden.

Had the outlaw killed her?

Had she escaped?

With doubt as to her fate, he gave the lasso its last whirl and sent it flying toward the man.

It was aimed as straight as a bullet, and the noose

settled down over the man's head, there was a hard and quick pull, and down went the outlaw his full length upon the ground, and with force enough to half stun him.

Before he could realize what had happened, or rise to his feet, the tall form of the scout bent over him and a revolver muzzle was thrust into his face, while he heard the words:

"I want you."

"Lordy! who is you?"

"One who carries a rope especially to hang just such villains as you."

"Are you a road agent?" gasped the man.

"Oh, no, but you are."

"Me! don't you believe it."

"I know it."

"No yer don't, for I am an honest man."

"Your face belies you, then."

"Come, I want those weapons!"

And the scout unlinked the belt-of-arms and tossed them to one side, while the man asked, anxiously:

"What do you mean, pard?"

"To give you a little of your own medicine, now I have got you caught."

"I don't understand."

"If you are a road agent, you miss it in expecting to find I've got money."

The scout laughed and replied:

"Don't fool yourself. I've got the right man, the one I want, for you've got your sign under your shirt, I see, and your mask hangs on your saddle yonder, my Boy in Black."

The man turned very pale at the words of the scout, and an ugly look came into his eyes as though he felt he was in a desperate situation and meant to make a bold attempt to try conclusions with his captor, who was binding him securely with his lasso.

One effort quickly made to free himself was enough, however, as he was hurled to the ground with a strength that amazed him, and he wished no more.

"Now I've got you secure, tell me what about that young lady you were sneaking upon to catch with your lasso?"

Again the man's face turned livid, and he remained silent.

"You heard me, so answer."

"Then you saw me?"

"Yes."

"And was layin' for me to come back to my horse?"

"I was."

"Well, she's gone."

"Where?"

"Home."

"You didn't catch her, then?"

"You bet I did, for if you saw me, I won't lie."

"I saw you, and I wish to know what has become of her."

"Gone home."

"She escaped from you, then?"

"Well, she got away, but not from any act of her own."

"What do you mean?"

"She was rescued."

"By whom?"

"Has you ever heard tell o' a Man in Blue?"

"I have heard of him often, and once met him; in fact, he rendered me good service a short while ago."

"He's the man."

"That rescued Miss Vassar?"

"Yes."

"Where was he?"

"Lord knows; but he came dashing out of a thicket, and fired at me with his revolver."

"I didn't stop the bullet, but I knows when I has got enough, and I jist tumbled down all in a heap, and played dead 'poscadence."

"It went, and he rescued the girl and rode off with her, and I came back after my horse."

"Well, I am glad no harm befell her; but why did you seek to capture her?"

"For ransom money."

"All right; I want you, and so you go with me."

"Come, I'll help you mount, and then I'll take you face to face with Miss Vassar and see what she says."

And soon after the scout and his prisoner started at a canter for Hope Vale Ranch.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MAKING FRIENDS.

There was something about the Man in Blue that was very fascinating.

He certainly was exceedingly handsome, he possessed a slender yet fine physique, he rode with a grace and confidence that showed the perfect horseman, while his manners were courtly, he was intelligent, refined, and spoke in a low tone with a voice that was peculiarly rich and of an almost pathetic cadence.

He seemed to drop the affair at the graveyard, as he rode along and talked of matters wholly foreign to the surroundings.

Once he spoke of himself, and then only to say:

"I dislike city life, but love the wild career one leads out here in the midst of danger and living with nature all about you; none of man's artificial work."

"I enjoy the hunt for gold, and though I have struck it rich, as they say here, I still keep on in my search."

"One out here hears such strange stories, we hardly know what to believe, and I am glad to be able to see for myself just what you are," said Blanche.

"Then you have heard my picture drawn in all shades and colors, I suppose?" he remarked, with a smile.

"Oh, yes, I have heard it said that you were a woman in disguise; again that you were a government detective looking up criminals, that you were a gambler, a desperado, a fugitive from justice; in fact all that one can be, and now I find you——"

"What?"

He asked the question abruptly, as Blanche paused; but, though she flushed slightly, she replied, pleasantly:

"Well, I will admit that the horns and cloven hoofs are missing in your make-up, and if you are not what you seem you certainly play the part of a gentleman well."

"Thanks, Miss Vassar."

"Oh, don't thank me, for I am only getting square for the compliment you paid me a while since; but there comes

Myrtle and her brother after me, doubtless alarmed by my long stay."

As she spoke Allan Tremain and Myrtle came in sight, riding rapidly toward them.

Myrtle was indeed a beautiful girl, with dreamy blue eyes, the longest of black lashes shading them, a wealth of gold brown hair and an elegant form.

Allan had discarded his derby hat for a slouch, and his attire of the tenderfoot for a pair of buckskin leggins, top-boots and a *négligé* shirt, while about his waist was a belt of arms, and a repeating rifle hung at his saddle horn.

They seemed surprised at finding Blanche with company, but Allan Tremain recognized the Man in Blue at a glance, and called out:

"Ah, Mr. Belfont, we meet again, and where I have the pleasure of making you our guest, for you will, of course, go on to Hope Vale with us—but permit me to present you to my sister."

The blue silver-embroidered sombrero was doffed, revealing the golden, wavy hair, as the Man in Blue bent low at the introduction, while Myrtle extended her hand and said:

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Belfont, for my brother has told us of your kind service at Trail End City, and we owe you renewed thanks now, for bringing home this runaway."

"It was my pleasure, Miss Tremain, to serve as an escort."

"Ah! much more than that, Mr. Belfont, for you were my rescuer," and Blanche hastily told the story of her adventure, while the Man in Blue said:

"I had started over to the store in the valley, but found that I had left some letters I wished to mail, so decided to return to my ranch and come back to-morrow."

"I took the trail by the burying ground through some intuition of good luck in store for me, and came upon Miss Vassar in trouble."

"That is all there is of it."

"The man you killed would not hold that opinion could he speak for himself, Mr. Belfont," said Allan Tremain, and then he added:

"But father and mother were anxious about you, Blanche, and we came in search of you."

"You must go on with us to Hope Vale, Mr. Belfont."

"Certainly, we can take no refusal," Myrtle said, while Blanche added:

"You promised to escort me home, Mr. Belfont, and I will hold you to the compact."

"Thus urged, I cannot refuse, especially as I wish to see Judge Tremain and report to him the killing of the outlaw, and as I will take him back to my ranch and have my men bury him, there will be no need of a coroner's inquest," and, dropping back to the side of Myrtle as her escort, the party continued on at a rapid gallop to the Tremain Ranch, the Man in Blue having won favor with his new-found friends.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A STARTLING RECOGNITION.

The stories told of the Man in Blue had not impressed Judge Tremain favorably toward him, until his son and Dr. Donohue had reported the affair in the Last Chance lay-out in Trail End City.

The fact was that when there was any one particularly marked upon the frontier, all kinds of tales went the rounds about him, and the judge had leaned toward believing some things he heard of the Mysterious Man in Blue, and it was a regret to him when he heard that he had established himself on a ranch over beyond the range.

He had been told that the Man in Blue was a man killer, and there were too many reckless characters then in the settlement to look with favor upon another one coming to settle there, and one who affected such a remarkable costume as did Ford Belfont.

What his son had told him of the Man in Blue had, however, changed his opinion in a measure, and yet he did not seem pleased with beholding the stranger returning with his daughter, son and Blanche.

The cabin of the Tremains was a very large one, three commodious rooms being on each side of a hall twenty feet wide by fifty in depth.

There were wings on each side, and a large kitchen in the rear, for the judge was wont to say that with thousands of acres of land about him he wished to have a home that was large enough to extend hospitality when there was a wish to do so.

The judge had brought with him a family of negro servants, reared on the Maryland plantation, and old "Aunt Kittie" was a cook to make one's heart glad, while her husband, "Uncle Toby," had served as butler since he was of age, and knew just how things were liked in the Tremain household, though it was a frontier home.

Mrs. Tremain was a woman wrapped up in her family and her home, and if ever she had a regret for the change, a longing for the luxuries of her past, she never expressed it in word or look.

The two, the judge and his wife, were seated upon the broad piazza of their home when they saw the party of four coming on at a gallop, and Mrs. Tremain said:

"They have found Blanche, and some one else is with them."

"Yes, wife, and it can be none other than the Man in Blue, for he is dressed like a Mexican dandy, and no one else rigs up that way."

"I wonder where they met him, husband?"

"Allan knows him, you remember, and they have met him on the trail and picked him up for supper, I guess; but I would rather not have to entertain such picturesque strangers."

But Judge Tremain was the soul of hospitality, and advanced to meet the party as they dismounted, and shook hands with the Man in Blue when Allan presented him, in his turn introducing him to his wife and remarking:

"Mr. Belfont will, of course, be our guest for the night, wife."

"Thank you, no, Judge Tremain, for I must return to-night to my ranch," was the answer, and then Blanche explained her meeting with Mr. Belfont and the great debt of gratitude she was under to him.

Mrs. Tremain turned pale, and said:

"Oh, Blanche, what danger do you not run into, and how grateful we should all be to Mr. Belfont for his rescue of you."

The ladies then retired to prepare for supper, leaving the judge, Allan and their guest upon the piazza, talking

over the attack of the outlaw upon Blanche, the former remarking:

"You left him where he fell, Mr. Belfont?"

"Yes, Judge Tremain; I did not even approach him."

"Are you sure that he was dead?"

"No more than that I fired to kill, sir, and I have the reputation of being a dead shot," was the modest reply.

"Well, my son will return with you, as you say you must go back to-night, and I will send men along to bury the body. Ah! who is that coming, Allan, for my sight is not what it once was?"

"It is Captain Cody, sir, and he has some one with him."

"I am glad, for they will be in time for supper—do you recognize the one with him, Mr. Belfont?" asked the judge, as he saw the Man in Blue rise quickly and gaze toward the two horsemen.

"I do recognize the men, sir, one being your champion at Trail End City, Mr. Tremain, and the other the man I supposed was dead—the kidnaper of Miss Vassar."

"I do not understand it, gentlemen," and the Man in Blue seemed in a quandary as to what the appearance of the supposed dead man could mean.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FOES, BUT NEVER FRIENDS.

The judge was fairly startled, as was the Man in Blue, and Allan Tremain looked rather bewildered at the appearance with Buffalo Bill of one who was supposed to be dead.

They all three walked from the piazza to meet the scout, and as they approached the spot where he had halted at the rack to hitch his horses, they saw that the one with him was securely bound.

"Well, Captain Cody, I am glad to see you, and it appears that you have unwelcome company," said the judge in his hearty manner.

"Most welcome company rather say, judge, as I have captured a man whom it is not safe to have at large.

"Is Miss Vassar here, sir?" he added, quickly.

"Yes, she arrived half an hour ago, escorted by our friend here, Mr. Belfont, whom you doubtless know as the Man in Blue, and to whom we all are deeply grateful for his services to Miss Vassar this afternoon."

Buffalo Bill turned to the Man in Blue and to Allan Tremain, and replied:

"Then it is true what this man told me, that the Man in Blue rescued Miss Vassar from him?"

"Yes, perfectly true."

"Oh, yes, I told you the truth, pard," said the prisoner, who was still seated upon his horse, bound hands and feet.

"May I ask how it is I find you alive, my man, when I supposed I had sent a bullet through your brain?" said the Man in Blue to the prisoner.

"You didn't send your bullet where yer wanted to, that is all, for I hain't dead, as you see.

"It was a close call, though, as the lead grazed my temple, and I took the hint and dropped.

"The trouble was, pard, you didn't feel my pulse to see if I was dead."

And the fellow laughed, while the Man in Blue said, with a significant smile:

"It is better as it is, for now the rope will make sure work of you."

"Don't say it, Man in Blue; and, besides, I'm this gent's game, not yours."

"How comes it, Captain Cody, that you captured the fellow?" asked Allan Tremain.

"I was coming by this trail when I saw him from the ridge leave his horse and creep up on some one."

"I soon saw that Miss Vassar was his intended victim, and, not wishing to fire on him, I went to where he had left his horse and awaited his return."

"When he appeared, I caught him with my lariat, and he told me that the Man in Blue had rescued Miss Vassar and ridden away with her."

"You bet he caught me with his rope, and he throws it for all there is in it," said the prisoner, while the judge remarked:

"Yes; your own testimony condemns you, my man."

"But come in, captain, for you are in ample time for supper, and I will see that your prisoner is cared for, as his crime is too serious to allow of his escaping."

"Yes, judge, he must not escape," the scout said, firmly.

"No, indeed, for an example made of a few of his kind, judge, would do a great deal of good in the settlement, from all I hear of the lawlessness here."

"I am going to the village from here, and I shall be glad to place the fellow in the lock-up you have there, if Captain Cody will intrust him to my care."

For a moment Buffalo Bill was silent, but then replied:

"He is in the hands of Judge Tremain, sir, and if he is willing for you to guard him to Silver Thread to-night, I certainly am."

"Oh, yes, though we can secure him here to-night, if you will remain until to-morrow, Mr. Belfont."

"Thank you, sir, but I must go on soon after supper, and I will see that the prisoner is safely delivered in the Silver Thread lock-up," was the reply of the Man in Blue.

"I must thank you, sir, for saving me a long ride," the scout remarked, while the judge said:

"But you will remain with us overnight, Cody?"

"Thank you, sir, I will," was the reply, and the prisoner having been left in the charge of a cowboy, who was told to give him some supper, the judge led his guests into the house, as it was twilight now, and they joined the ladies, who gave Buffalo Bill a warm welcome, while the Man in Blue said:

"It seems, Captain Cody, that I have met you before our meeting in Trail End City; in fact, am I mistaken in saying that you are the famous scout, Buffalo Bill?"

"I did not know that I was famous, sir, but you are not mistaken in believing that I was known as Buffalo Bill, though now I have come to Silver Thread to find a home."

"As I have done," and the Man in Blue offered his arm to Mrs. Tremain, as supper was announced, with all the grace of a courtier.

An hour after he took his leave, accompanied by the prisoner, while, hardly had he gotten out of sight before Buffalo Bill, against the urging of all, mounted his horse and followed in the trail of the Man in Blue.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BUFFALO BILL GROWS SUSPICIOUS.

It was after supper, while the Man in Blue was singing a duet with Myrtle Tremain, that Buffalo Bill managed to slip out of the parlor after giving a significant look to Allan Tremain to follow.

They walked a few paces away from the house, and then the scout said:

"See here, Mr. Tremain, I have lived so much among bad men and Indians that I am growing suspicious of many who may be all right in reality."

"I do not wonder, Captain Cody, that you are suspicious, living with your life in your hands as you do; but who has awakened your suspicions now?"

"It may be all simply distrust, but will you, if the Man in Blue comes here often, and come he will, keep an eye on him without appearing to do so?"

"I will, of course; but do you really think he is one to watch?"

"He may not be, and yet, who knows anything about him?"

"He has a record as a man-killer, as you know, though I admit he is not one who seems to seek trouble, and he certainly rendered us good service at Trail End City, and rescued Miss Vassar from that outlaw."

"But I'll tell you frankly that I am suspicious of him, and when he leaves to-night I go, too, so explain it to your father, please."

"I will, Captain Cody; but do you need my aid?"

"No, thank you, for I am merely going to see that the prisoner is delivered safely in Silver Thread lock-up, for I want that man for future reference."

"I'll explain your going to father and the ladies," was the answer, and the two returned to the parlor where the voice of the Man in Blue was heard singing "Annie Laurie" with exquisite expression and melody.

It was soon after that the Man in Blue took his departure, followed five minutes after by Buffalo Bill, and Myrtle's close observation of both men caused her to make the remark that she did, that they could never be friends.

"I do not see why, Myrtle, for the Man in Blue is certainly a most charming gentleman, just the kind to win friends, I should say," said Blanche.

"I admit that he is a fascinating man, Blanche, refined, courtly in his manners, and a fine talker, though modest and unassuming, and yet there is that about him that impressed me unfavorably also, though what it is I cannot tell or explain, and I could never know him better than I do to-night."

"I certainly saw that he also impressed Captain Cody, and yet not favorably, I feel certain, and the two men seemed to read each other, or that is my opinion."

"Why, Myrtle, you argue your case like a lawyer," said Allan Tremain, laughing, and he added:

"But you are right, I am sure, for Cody did not appear to take to the man when he came to our aid in Trail End City, and to-night he certainly was watching him closely and followed on his trail really because he had some doubt of him."

"What doubt could he have, Allan?" asked Blanche.

"Well, the prisoner offered Captain Cody, the latter told me, a couple of thousand dollars if he would allow him to go, no one else knowing of his capture, and he had the money with him, too, the scout said, and, therefore, there was a desire on his part not to let the fellow escape should the Man in Blue yield to the temptation of the same offer."

"But Mr. Belfont is very rich, I believe," urged Blanche.

"He may and he may not be, my dear."

"I have heard it said that he has found some rich mines, yet he is not working them that I know of, and it may be all talk."

"I rather like him myself, but I have that confidence in Cody that I am sure he is not one to make a mistake, and if he suspects Belfont he has some good reason for it, and these are times to be suspicious in this valley after all that we have gone through with," and the judge spoke earnestly, but it was certain that Blanche was determined to champion the Man in Blue.

In the meanwhile Buffalo Bill had gone but a short distance along the trail after them when he suddenly turned off to the right, and, putting his horse into a sweeping gallop, held on at that pace for some miles.

Then he approached the main trail again through a canyon, and, hitching his horse, he walked rapidly to a group of rocks around which the road turned that the Man in Blue and his prisoner would have to ride.

He had not waited long before he heard voices and hoof falls approaching, but what was being said he could not hear, and, reaching the rocks, the two ceased talking.

But they passed within a few feet of the scout lying in wait, and continued on along the trail.

Mounting again, Buffalo Bill rode on, to at last halt near the group of cabins that comprised the village of Silver Thread City.

"Well, he certainly has delivered up the prisoner at the lock-up, and now to see which way he will go," and hardly had the scout uttered the words when the Man in Blue dashed by the place where he had halted in the shadow of some trees, riding at full speed.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHAT THE JAILER HAD TO SAY.

It was nearly dawn when Buffalo Bill at last reached his home, at Solace Lodge, both his horse and himself very tired after their long day's ride and work.

Dr. Donohue had long since gone to bed, and the scout quickly turned in.

Dallas Donohue loved his ease, even in Borderland, and was not an early riser, so when Buffalo Bill slept late the next morning it just chimed in with his humor, and it was nine o'clock before they had breakfast.

The scout had taken a great fancy to both Dr. Donohue and Allan Tremain, and he was telling the former of his adventures of the day before, and the rescue of Blanche by the Man in Blue, when they saw a horseman approaching at a run.

"It is Allan, for I recognize his style of riding, and yet he seems to come on as though he had news," said the doctor.

A moment after Allan Tremain dashed up to the cabin, and as he threw himself from his horse he called out:

"Captain Cody, your prisoner has escaped."

"Impossible, for I saw him safe in the lock-up, for the Man in Blue delivered him there after all, and Jake Jessop took him in charge."

"But he has escaped, and I came to notify you, as father deemed it best."

"We were over to Silver Thread this morning, and we could not find Jessop, so all began to look for him, and we found him in the cabin lock-up gagged and in irons, while the prisoner was gone."

"As soon as he could talk he did so, and he was mad clean through, as he told us that he had been wakened up at his cabin by several horsemen, who said that they had a prisoner for him to lock up."

"He went with them over to the lock-up, taking the pretended prisoner along with him, and as he opened the door he was struck a violent blow that half stunned him, and then they quickly gagged and bound him, after which they took out the prisoner and locked him within in his place."

"Not a word was spoken, only the prisoner laughed and said:

"'Jake, the jail was never built that would hold a Boy in Black, nor the rope made that will hang one.'

"Then he mounted, and the party rode away, so father thought it best for me to come and notify you at once."

"I am glad that you did so, Mr. Tremain, and——"

"Don't mister me, Captain Cody, but call me plain Allan, pard, or Tremain."

"All right, pard, I'll go you; but now we'll ride to Silver Thread and pick up the trail of those Boys in Black and see where it came from and where it leads."

"Will you go, doctor?"

"Oh, yes, for I may be needed," and ten minutes after the three mounted and rode rapidly away.

It was over an hour's ride to Silver Thread, and when they got there they found quite a crowd gathered, and Jake had told his story over and over again until one of the men said:

"Say, Jake, pull the string on yourself, or you'll wear your teeth out talking."

The crowd laughed, but Jake was very wrathful over his prisoner's escape, and was glad when Judge Tremain called him to one side and told him to again tell the whole story over to Captain Cody, the doctor and Allan Tremain.

"You saw the men?" asked Cody.

"Oh, yes."

"One pretended to be a prisoner?"

"Yes, he was bound, I thought, only he wasn't, for he was the one who hit me—see, he gave me a black eye, and they had me gagged and tied before I could say anything."

"How many were there?"

"I counted seven men, including the man who done me."

"How were they mounted, dressed, and what did they say?"

"They rode black horses, but were not masked, though they seemed rigged up in a black suit.

"Only the prisoner spoke as they left, and then I was left in the jug while they rode off, and that's all I know."

"Who brought you the prisoner?"

"The Man in Blue, just before midnight, and he told me to keep him subject to the call of Judge Tremain, who would try him for some crime he had committed, and that's all I know, pard."

Buffalo Bill made no reply, but thanked the keeper of the cabin known as the "Silver Thread Jail," and rode away, followed by the judge and the two young men.

"Well, Cody, what move is next to be taken?" the judge asked, when the four had ridden half a mile from the fort.

"I am following this trail of the fugitive and his rescuers, sir."

"Ah, yes, their trail.

"I see it now; but you will want more of us to go with you."

"No, judge, I will go alone, unless the two young gentlemen wish to go with me, for you, sir, are not to track criminals but to try them after we catch them."

"Well, Cody, I obey orders always; but you certainly will need more men, as Jake Jessop says there were seven of them."

"We are not going to fight outlaws now, judge, but to track them,

"They are already safe from immediate pursuit, but much can be found out by the signs of a trail, and we will report results on our return."

"See here, Captain Cody, you have not the most perfect confidence in the Man in Blue?"

"I can only say, sir, that I suspect him, perhaps without reason; but when I am suspicious of a man I watch him—I am watching the Man in Blue," and, leaving the judge to return to his home, Buffalo Bill and his two tenderfoot pards continued on along the outlaws' trail.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CHAIN OF EVIDENCE.

"See here, pards, I tie to you every time, and if you have not been long on the frontier you are learning your lessons fast and well.

"I can trust you, and that is saying a great deal, and now I'll tell you frankly that I do not like the Man in Blue."

So said Buffalo Bill as the two young men rode on with him after leaving the judge.

"Is it prejudice that prompts your doubt, Captain Cody, or proof of guilt?" asked Dr. Donohue.

"So far from its being prejudice, I should be prejudiced in his favor, for he certainly came to our rescue in Trail End, and again helped Miss Vassar out of a very serious scrape.

"He is a gentleman in appearance and outward action, but he is, mark my words, a man to watch.

"Mind you, I do not say that he is guilty of any crime that drove him West, that he is an outlaw; but he has a home in Trail End City, another in the Sunset Mining Camp, and now he has a ranch just over beyond the range.

"No one knows a word about his antecedents, and he never speaks of himself or one being who holds a claim upon him.

"He knew me, as you saw, and yet, as the Man in Blue or Ford Belfont, I never saw him in my life, before the night I met him in the Last Chance Lay-out at Trail End City.

"Now, I may have imagined it, but I thought I saw a look pass between the Man in Blue and the prisoner.

"He volunteered to take my prisoner to Silver Thread and lock him up; was it through kindness for me, to prevent my going ten miles out of my way?

"The prisoner offered me a good, large bribe, and he had the money, to let him go, and when I did not, he seemed very little worried about his fate.

"Now, the Man in Blue did deliver the prisoner to Jake Jessop, and within an hour or so after he was released by six or seven men.

"How did these men know he was a prisoner?"

"If they saw him captured, why did they not rescue him from me?"

"Such is the line of argument I take, and I now intend to take the trail of the Man in Blue, see where it joins the tracks of the prisoner's rescuers, and then where it leads; but, see here; this is the track of his horse; it is a peculiar one, as you observe, and you will see that it goes back to Silver Thread, along with the men who went there to take the man out of the lock-up.

"We will find out what it means."

Both Dr. Donohue and Allan Tremain were considerably impressed with the quiet reasoning of the scout.

It did put a shade of suspicion upon the Man in Blue, and they were anxious to have it explained.

They rode carefully along on the trail, catching sight now and then of the single track of the horse ridden by the Man in Blue, and after a ride of half a dozen miles Buffalo Bill called them to note that the trail turned off up a canyon.

Here were found the traces of where half a dozen horsemen had evidently been camping for a day or more.

"They were here all of twenty-four hours, and they came from over the range, you see, and went back that way.

"The trail of the Man in Blue came directly to this point, and from here the rescuers started to Silver Thread lock-up and returned this way.

"There were twelve horses, not including that of the Man in Blue," and Buffalo Bill went on reading the signs in a manner that amazed the two young men and won their admiration.

"You certainly know your business, Captain Cody, and I think that the Man in Blue has something to explain that it will puzzle him to do," Allan Tremain remarked.

"Yes; if he did not come here, where these men were, and lead them back to the lock-up to rescue that prisoner, all signs fail," rejoined the doctor.

"Ah! some one is coming, and at a run, too—yes, there are more than one horseman, so be ready for a fight or a stampede," cried Buffalo Bill, riding toward the shelter of some timber in the canyon, and unslinging his rifle for use, while his comrades did the same.

Just as they reached the timber a horseman dashed into view, riding at full speed, and behind him came others as though in pursuit.

The one in advance was the Man in Blue.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN EXPLANATION.

"The Man in Blue!" cried Buffalo Bill, as he caught sight of the horseman, and the manner in which he rode showed that he was flying for his life.

"Stand by, pards, for that looks like a pursuit, as others are coming," cried Buffalo Bill, and they could distinctly hear the clatter of hoofs in the canyon.

"If he is pursued, we have wronged the Man in Blue," said Allan Tremain.

"It looks that way—but here they come," and Buffalo Bill rode into view and hailed the Man in Blue.

"Ho, pard, this way if you seek friends."

A cry broke from the lips of the Man in Blue, and he wheeled his horse off the trail and quickly rode toward the timber.

As he did so he called out:

"If you are alone turn and fly with me, for there are half a score of those fellows chasing me."

"I am not alone, and we will make a stand," called back Buffalo Bill, and as the horsemen in pursuit dashed into sight he raised his rifle to his shoulder and pulled trigger.

The crack of the rifle seemed the first intimation that the outlaws had of the presence of help for the fugitive horseman they had been pursuing so hard.

As one of their horses went down, with a bullet in his brain, the others drew rein quickly, just as Buffalo Bill called out:

"Now, pards, catch them in their surprise and let them have it, for they are Boys in Black, as you see."

The Man in Blue had now reached his rescuers, and drawn rein, but as the others raised their rifles to fire, he called out:

"See, I cannot help you, for I am in irons."

The three rifles flashed together, and then, following the example set them by the scout, Allan Tremain and Donohue began to pump the lead at the outlaws, who at once stampeded, leaving one of their number dead and another wounded on the field, while a second horse went down also under their fire.

The outlaws did not halt when they got out of sight in the canyon, but kept up their flight, as the sound of the rapid clatter of hoofs growing fainter and fainter proved.

Then Buffalo Bill remarked, coolly:

"We have set them going, and, Doc, there is work for you, for we must save that fellow who is wounded, but unable to rise," and he led the way at a gallop to the scene, the others following.

There lay two of the splendid black horses the outlaws rode, and the dead form of one of the Boys in Black, and a wounded man sat on the ground further away.

"Dead! that was your shot, Mr. Cody," said Dallas Donohue, placing his hand lightly upon the pulse of the dead man.

"Now the other, doctor."

The other outlaw had drawn the mask from his face, as though for air, and dropped back in recumbent position as the scout and the others approached.

"Ho, pard, it is you, is it?"

"Better have stayed in the lock-up and taken your chances with the Vigilantes," said Buffalo Bill, as he recognized his prisoner of the night before.

"Yes, it's me, and I guess I've got my graveyard medicine, so will cheat yer Vigilantes from a hangin' picnic, if you had any, which yer hain't, for the Boys in Black done for them, and scared 'em off from havin' any more.

"But I is done for."

"No, you have too much breath to have it limited by a wound.

"How is it, doctor?" said the scout.

"It is a wound in an ugly place, but the bullet may have glanced on a rib and if so it is not serious.

"I will find out soon," and the doctor told the outlaw to lie down and let him examine the wound.

"What fer?"

"If it hain't serious yer'll jab a probe into my vitals and kill me, and if it is fatal, I'll soon pass in my chips.

"Jist let me lie here and die in peace."

"Oh, no; we will see that you are cared for," and, leaving the doctor to examine the wound, now that he had gotten out his case of instruments, which Buffalo Bill had told him never to go without in that country, he turned to the Man in Blue and said:

"Pardon me, pard, for not seeing to you before, but it was a case of the dead and dying first—you are in irons, I see."

The Man in Blue's wrists were manacled, while his feet were tied beneath his horse.

"Yes, I am tied up, but it is far better than having a rope about my neck, for those devils meant to hang me," he said.

"Indeed! how was it?"

"I delivered my prisoner at the lock-up and then started for my ranch, and right here in this canyon ran into an ambush.

"They caught both my horse and myself with lassos, and resistance was useless.

"They said they had been waiting for a pard, who was on a special duty, and, as he was long overdue, they were sure he had been killed or captured.

"Without thinking of what they might do, I told them that they need not wait, as their pard was safe in the Silver Thread lock-up.

"I at once saw my mistake, for they decided to go and rescue him, and they ironed and bound me as you see, and I had to go along with them.

"Your being here, gentlemen, proves that you have

discovered the escape of the prisoner, and were on his trail.

"When we halted, some miles back in the range, I made an effort to escape, and, wheeling my horse, suddenly dashed away.

"But for you I would have been captured, for, my hands being manacled and feet bound, I could not urge my horse any faster, and they had frankly said they intended to hang me."

The scout glanced at his two comrades at the explanation of the Man in Blue, as though to say:

"I was wrong, and did him an injustice."

CONCLUSION.

With one of the Boys in Black wounded and a prisoner and another dead, Buffalo Bill felt that it was time to strike a hard blow against the outlaws.

"We have them on the run, boys," he said to his companions, "and the thing is to keep them on the run."

Allan and Dr. Donohue were ready at once to go on the trail of the outlaws, and a number of settlers were quickly gathered together with the majority of the Vigilantes to go on the trail.

The Man in Blue, who had now been cleared of suspicion, was very much shaken up by his recent adventures, and said that he preferred remaining behind rather than going in for further adventures.

A little later Buffalo Bill led his followers on the trail of the fleeing outlaws.

Their horses were fresh, the trail was good, and the chase ended in the overtaking of the outlaws and the wipe-out of the whole ten of them.

Such a heavy blow, together with the knowledge that there was a man in Silver Thread City who was their master, either at fighting or trailing, discouraged the Boys in Black considerably.

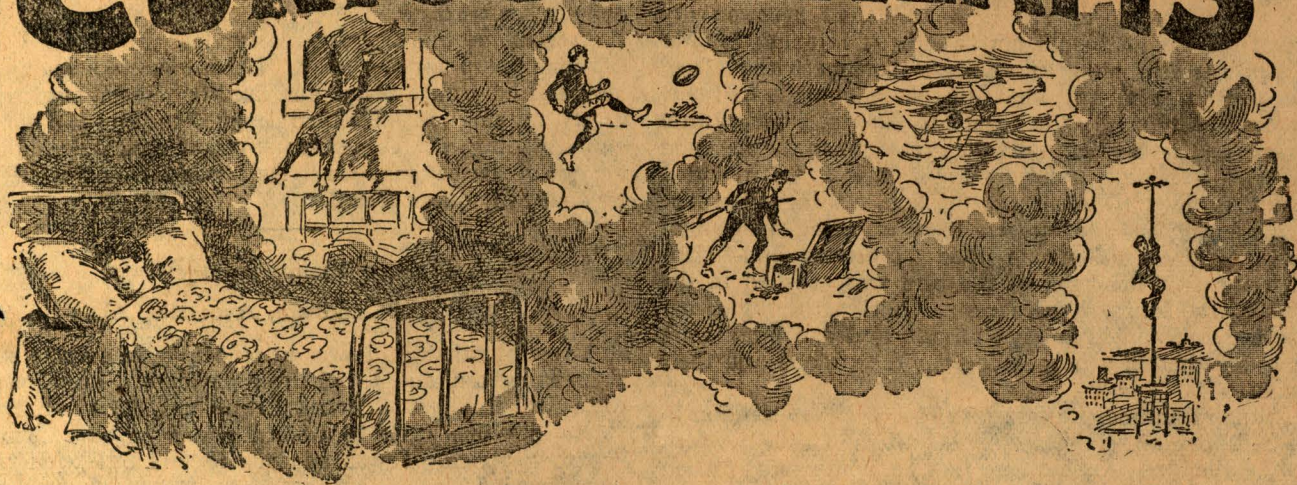
Their secret hiding-place was not discovered, but it generally known that the band had scattered, and many a day the inhabitants of Silver Thread City lived in peace and serenity.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 88, will contain "Buffalo Bill and the Man in Blue; or, the Volunteer Vigilantes of Silver Thread City." Of course, you are interested in knowing the further history of the Man in Blue.

When the mystery surrounding him was finally removed it meant a big surprise to everybody concerned. Can any of you guess who he really was? Make your guess, and then read next week's issue to find out who he really was. The Volunteer Vigilantes did some fine work, which will be told in next week's issue. You will want to read all about that, too.

CURIOUS DREAMS



Are you still dreaming, boys?

Let us know the results.

It is a capital contest so far.

For list of prizes and conditions, see page 31.

The Crimson City.

(By Robert Laughlin, Poquonock Bridge, Conn.)

My dream revealed to me a distant city, its domes and spires effulgent with a soft, rosy glow. I realized that peace and happiness dominated there, and fascination led me onward. But as I reached the gates the city vanished in a cloud of gold-tinged smoke, and I found myself traversing a rocky, sand-strewn road, barren and desolate; hills upon one side, a broad, tranquil lake upon the other. A brilliant sun shone in the heavens and was mirrored with burning luster in the lake waters.

I saw an aged, white-haired man seated by the wayside.

"Can you direct me to the Crimson City?" I inquired, addressing him.

"Alas, no," he replied. "I myself have sought it for many days. I am sorely distressed. My wife and children were taken by a single blow of Death. But I still seek the city of red, for within its walls is Peace."

I resumed my way, and the sun grew brighter while the waters of the lake around its reflection assumed a ruby hue. I overtook a maiden clad in the garb of a fisher girl. Her face was fair, yet bore lines of woe.

"Can you direct me to the Crimson City?" I asked her.

"I know not the way myself," she said, "though I have long sought it. I crave the happiness that shines within its gates, for sorrow rests heavily upon me. My sailor-lover went away upon the sea and never returned. My heart is broken."

I spoke a word of sympathy, and continued on my journey.

Next I encountered a sad-faced woman, who led a small child by the hand. In response to my inquiry, she expressed her ignorance regarding the path to the Crimson City, and also announced her desire to enter its

gates. "My child and myself are starving and cold," she wailed. "We shall soon lie dead by the wayside." I divided a crust of bread with her, and once more journeyed on. The sun grew red and fierce and the lake waters began to gyrate around its reflection.

A man wandered from a glade and greeted me politely. "I know not the way to the red city," he said in reply to my query. "Would that I did. I was once a king, but my wealth and my kingdom were swept away. Alas! alas!"

At this moment the lake began to burn and hiss. A dense rose-colored smoke arose close over its surface, and drifted about me. The strains of thrilling music rang in my ears, the smoke clouds formed themselves into beautiful shapes, a feeling of unutterable happiness came over me, and I realized that I was in the Crimson City. I saw the aged man reunited with his dear ones, the fisher girl with her lover, and the woman and her child dowered with riches. I saw nothing of the polite man or his kingdom, which, I presume, he never recovered.

The Dream of the Upas Tree.

(By Sam W. Lawton, Arcadia, Fla.)

One night, after burning the midnight oil reading the adventures of Buffalo Bill, I fell asleep and dreamed that I was hunting in the jungles of Africa with the famous scout as my companion.

It seemed that Buffalo Bill had me along with him as a student of his, intending to make me his successor with pistol and rifle. Our hunting steeds were nothing more nor less than the African ostrich, captured and tamed by my inimitable master, and they were almost as fearless as they were swift.

It seemed that there was an abundance of game, both large and small, but I dreamed that there was no difficulty whatever in killing it. Only one time was I in any

danger of my life, and that was when a huge and ferocious lion sprang toward me. If I had been on my guard the danger would not have been so great, but we had been riding along for quite a distance without seeing any game of any kind, just long enough to make me completely careless in regard to danger, when, with a growl I felt rather than saw, the great lion springing upon me with a bound. I hardly know how I did it, but I reined up my bird-steed, and the lion, making allowance in his spring for the rate we were traveling, instead of springing upon me, sprang upon the ostrich, and in another moment the head of the bird was crushed in the jaws of the king of the forest. Quick as thought, my rifle was out and in another minute bird and beast were lying together in a heap, mingling their blood and their brains.

In the meantime, Buffalo Bill, paying little attention to us, had gone on, entirely oblivious of the accident which had befallen me; so, knowing that he would return when he missed me, I sat down under a tree to rest.

How long I sat there I know not, for, being fatigued from my recent encounter, I must have dropped off into a doze, when, all at once, I felt myself lifted up into the air, and a thousand snakes resembling the boa-constrictor, wrapping themselves about my body and crushing the life out of me. I tried to free myself, but found it impossible to move; I tried to call to my late companion, but was unable to do so. I saw it was only the limbs of the tree encircling me and crushing my life out of me, so, trying time and time again, to cry out in the horror of my position I awoke.

Relating to my father this horrible dream, he told me that there was such a tree in Africa, and it was called the deadly Upas.

A Funny Dream.

(By Harold Greene, Brooklyn, N. Y.)

About three nights ago I had a very peculiar dream. I thought that I was stopping in the country. It was about dusk and as I went for the mail I saw a dark shadow dart among the trees. As I was passing a forest my suspicions were aroused, and I followed in the direction of the shadow. As I was a good runner, I quickly overtook the shadow. When I was nearly upon it, I could see that it was a man with a large bag on his back. I followed it a long while and, finally, I saw the man stop, take off his hat, wipe the perspiration from his forehead, then set the bundle down. As he went to remove the bundle from his shoulder I could see it was very heavy, for it went down with a bang. And I heard a voice from inside yelling as it went to the ground. It seemed like hours to me, but I waited to listen. After a while the man said that they would have to be moving; then he put the bundle upon his back and moved rapidly in the direction of the railroad station. Following him closely, I could make out that he meant business. He went to board the train and be off as soon as possible. I followed him to the baggage car and I heard the baggage-master say that it was necessary to stay in the car with his baggage. He saw he was followed, and, as I jumped aboard

the baggage-master left the room. As it was dark he did not see me enter.

As soon as the baggage-master left the room, I saw the man jump for the door. I made a quick jump for him, and he drew a pistol, and fired two shots, but, fortunately, missing me. He then dropped the bag and we began wrestling, but as he was stronger than I, he hurled me out of the baggage-car. As I was falling I woke up. So ended my queer dream.

A Narrow Escape from Prison.

(By Forest Landrum, Avondale, Ala.)

A few months ago I was an office boy in a large store in Birmingham, and I had three partners. Their names were Sam Emmerson, Frank Erkurt and Arthur Frazier.

One day they came to me and asked me how I would like to get rich. I was anxious to find out what they meant.

They said they had a mint out of town. They said we could make lots of money.


We had a twenty-five cent piece press, and a fifty-cent piece press.

We thought we had it so nobody could find it, but we were mistaken, for, one day, five policemen came in on us all at once. I was so scared I could not move, but Sam Emmerson and Frank Erkurt had pistols, and out came both of them and killed three policemen. The other two were going to take us to jail, but I don't remember any more, so I guess all this was a dream, for, next morning, the other boys were at work and they say they don't know anything of it.

Tortured by Indians.

(By Clarence Hand, Plainfield, N. J.)

While camping this summer I had a dream that is worth relating. I dreamed that I was captured by Indians, who, in the middle of the night, had made a raid on our camp. I was knocked senseless in the fight, was strapped on a horse and taken far into the forest. When the Indians reached their village, they put me into a tent for a short time; then I was taken out and tied to a tree. A great fire was built around me, which soon ate through my clothes and began to burn my flesh. As the fire ate into my legs I awoke and found that I had taken a walk in my sleep and had stepped into the camp-fire.

 \$1 worth of Tricks & Make-ups, sent postpaid for 25 cents stamps or silver. A nice Moustache or full Beard, Irish or Side Whiskers, any color, bottle Spirit Gum to stick them on. Box of Burnt Cork to blacken up, 1 in. Rubber Mouth, big teeth, secret & apparatus for performing the great vanishing half-dollar trick. This big offer is to get your address to send my large illu. cat'g of plays, wigs, tricks & eqts. latest novelties. Mention paper you saw this in and I will also put in a Heavy GOLD plate finger Ring FREE, send size. Address Chas. Marshall, Mfr., Lockport, N.Y.

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